



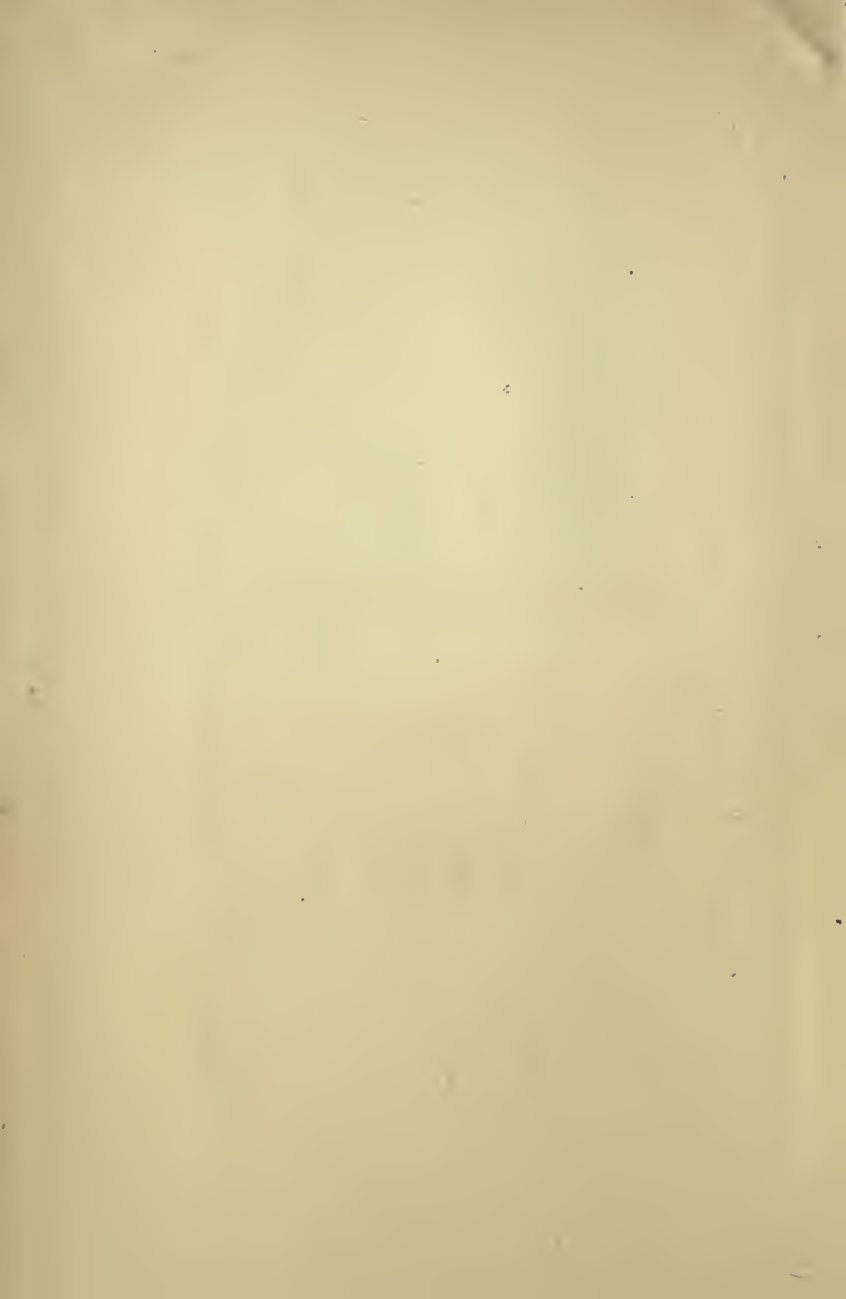
ADNAM'S ORCHARD



BY
SARAH
GRAND



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BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE HEAVENLY TWINS,"
"THE BETH BOOK," ETC.



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NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1913

ALMANAC'S ORCHARD

BY H. H. HAYES

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ADNAM'S ORCHARD

CHAPTER I

ALL over the countryside the first fragrant promise of spring in the air wrought happy trouble in the blood of sentient things. It was the first of March, and early morning; about the time when the world goes to work. The birds were still at breakfast, and, except for chirrupings and cheeping, were silent for the most part, but here and there one sang—wasting the precious time, a certain sort of observer would have said, betraying the limits of his own capacity by pointing an erroneous moral, as a certain sort of observer always does when pleasant things are in question; the sort, in this case, who has no music in himself, and therefore has no perception of the good of music to men on the march or to birds on the nest; to the weary with work and the weary with waiting; the sore of body and the sick of soul. Not that there were many birds on the nest as yet, except the blackbirds, first builders of the year; but everywhere there was busy preparation, and, as the day wore on, love and hope were voiced in low sweet notes, in passionate trills, in bursts of rapture, which caught and held the heart on a sudden, and roused the dormant senses once again to love and hope.

Amongst the human beings that morning much the same order prevailed as amongst the birds, but more prosaically. Nature calls to the birds, and the birds obey her, and she gives them joy unmarred; but man makes it his duty to thwart nature, who, to mark her displeasure, sees to it that ever with his dearest delight something of trouble is mixed. Labourers were at work in the fields; busy women bustled about indoors; loiterers lingered round breakfast tables; the wastrels were still in bed; but let them do or leave undone what they would,

for them all there was care; their songs were not whole-hearted, their loves were incomplete.

From the side door of his substantial house old Emery Pratt, yeoman, emerged, a hard low-crowned hat on his head, a stout stick in his hand, not used as a support but grasped in the middle like a weapon, ready for attack or defence, as occasion might require. Two sporting dogs were bounding about him, and his eldest son, Seraph, followed at his heels. Father and son they undoubtedly were—there was no mistaking the breed—but in this last specimen the strain was no longer pure. The father, a splendid old man, was thoroughbred of his kind, the son was a mongrel. In the pure strain the Pratts had the large deliberation of the land itself; the slow processes of nature were reflected in all their works and ways, its storms as well as its calms, its generous bounties. Physically they were fine men, with large limbs in perfect proportion, brains well balanced in their ample skulls, and colouring rich in health. But in Seraph there was a falling off in all these traits. Only in height did he approach his father. For the rest he was a weedy specimen, ill-proportioned, neutral-tinted, with a small insignificant head, and something furtive both in gait and manner which contrasted unfavourably with the solid, simple, self-respecting directness which was the prominent characteristic of his father's family. He had none of the largeness of nature either, which made few words mean much from his forebears. Where they had needed to be nothing but laconic, he had been driven to loquaciousness, as though, by the incessant flow of his speech, he were trying to disguise its shallowness. But he could curb his exuberance, too, on occasion, calling craft to his aid where his ancestors would have brandished an honest weapon. He had his good points however. He was excellent on the land, his father's trustiest support. Politically and socially a bigoted conservative, in agriculture he was his father's son, and his father was progressive. And father and son together had made Pratt's Place the most thriving property in that countryside.

Once clear of the house, old Emery stopped, took off his hat, drew a deep breath of the morning air, and looked about him. In all his movements there was the calm deliberation of a strong man, whose outlook upon life was decided so far as it went. He neither dawdled nor made haste, but took his time like one who

knows that there is time enough allotted to him for all that he has to do. He surveyed the land, his own land as far as the eye could reach from where he stood, fourteen hundred good acres in a ring fence, upon which Pratts had been born and died since the days of Henry VII., who, in his wise fostering of the agricultural class, and by his "*profound and admirable*" enactment, as Bacon tells us, made "*farms and houses of a standard; that is, maintained with such a proportion of land unto them, as may breed a subject to live in convenient plenty and no servile condition; and to keep the plough in the hands of the owners, and not mere hirelings.*" The Pratts had added to their acres since Henry VII.'s time, and had built themselves a house in which they might well live "in convenient plenty and no servile condition." Old Emery glanced at it now. It was an early Tudor house, with steep gabled roof, ornate groups of tall, cut brick chimneys, and high, narrow, small-paned windows; a picturesque house of comfortable size, with which the present owner had many pleasant characteristics in common. Had he been a squire the house would have been called a hall; to a tenant farmer it would have been simply a farm in spite of its size; but the Pratts themselves had not attempted to classify it. Being easy going and unpretentious, lower in rank than esquire and higher than tenant farmer—yeoman, that is to say, with no wish to be other than yeoman—they had left the difficulty to the convenience of the neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood had solved it by calling the house Pratt's Place, otherwise Pratt's for short.

After that one comprehensive survey, old Pratt walked on, setter and pointer gambolling about him, his son following at his heels. They crossed the lawn in front of the house, passed through a thick shrubbery out into a private road, leading from the highway to Pratt's Place. On their right as they emerged from the shrubbery, and bounded by an old stone wall, were the farm buildings and rick and cattle yards.

"Where's your brother?" old Emery asked, glancing back at his son as if he expected to see the answer rather than to hear it.

Seraph hunched his sloping shoulders.

"Can't you speak, man?" his father growled. "I asked you where your brother is."

"He's doing nothing down yonder in the orchard," Seraph answered with a snigger. There was an unpleasant affectation in his voice. He spoke like an underbred man imitating the tone of a gentleman.

"I didn't ask you what he was doing," his father snapped, grasping his stick and shaking it, as though he longed to apply it to something.

Seraph had his eye on the stick, and the expression of his face was lowering; but after a pause, when he spoke, it was carelessly, and as if for the sake of saying something. "It takes all sorts to make a world, they say," he observed.

"I never heard it said that the bad sort was necessary," his father muttered; "nor that the world would be a worse world if the bad sort was left out altogether—and I doubt if it could be proved."

He walked on for a little, ruminating. Seraph, following a few steps behind, furtively watched him, and waited, as was his wont when he had said something with significant intent, for his father's slow moving mind to seize upon the application.

The old man rounded upon him presently: "Do you mean to say your brother's a bad sort?" he demanded.

Again Seraph hunched his sloping shoulders. He had a habit of picking his steps furtively, as if there were something to fear were he overheard, ducking his head like a camel as he walked and talked, and twitching his shoulders, tricks well calculated to irritate a straightforward person. He never gave an honest shrug about which there could be no mistake. The meaning of his twitch was always ambiguous. It might express dissent, or contempt for your opinion; or, if dissent and contempt proved dangerous, it could be passed off as an involuntary effort to adjust his coat collar comfortably.

The habitual gesture irritated his father now; "You'll not say what you mean anyway," he muttered. "It isn't your way to speak out."

"I'll go out of my way then this time," Seraph said, smiling. "I don't say Adnam's a bad sort. I say he's doing nothing."

"You mean he's a good-for-nothing?"

Seraph's shoulders jerked, but he restrained the gesture. "No, I don't," he declared.

His father eyed him shrewdly. "You've something in your

crooked mind," he said. "Out with it, man." Seraph looked hurt. "Out with it, man, I say," his father repeated, shaking his stick. "What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything," came the inevitable retort. "At least—" Seraph assumed a diffident expression, and hesitated. "Well, I am afraid. I'm afraid of annoying you, sir. But there is something I should like to say."

Old Emery's testiness gave way to his sense of justice. "Well, you've a right to speak your mind, my lad," he allowed; "and I'll never deny you the right. But speak out like a man. It's your damned beating about the bush that riles me. What is it now? Adnam, of course. You've always a down on that boy."

"That's how you look at it," said Seraph mildly.

"How should I look at it?"

"Why, father, if you looked at it, and saw some sense of duty in it, some concern for the boy's future, you'd be fairer to me. Adnam's young to you yet, but he's not so young to me. You think there's plenty of time. I don't. He's twenty-one—a man grown. At his age I was hard at work about the place."

His father nodded. He had had qualms himself about Adnam's idleness.

They were amongst the cattle in the yard by this time. Seraph was going to drive to a neighbouring farmer to arrange about the sale of some beasts. The stockman came up to them, and they began to inspect and discuss. Then the dogcart was brought round. Seraph got in, and gathered up the reins. His father let him start. Then he called after him: "I'll speak to Adnam."

Seraph called back over his shoulder: "Thank you, sir!" as if grateful for a favour granted to himself.

That "Thank you, sir!" was a mistake.

The conservative Englishman respects a position apart from the personality of its temporary occupant, and, as a rule, no defect of an eldest son weighs with his father against what is due to him by right of primogeniture. To his eldest son old Emery accorded the full rights of his position. He had brought him up on the place which was to be his, and instructed him in every detail of its management conscientiously, as had been the custom of every father who owned the property since the Pratts were a family; and the young man had answered satisfactorily

to his expectations in all that concerned the practical business of life. But in his character there were traits which irritated his father and provoked antagonism. The old man, straight and open himself, was angered by anything that savoured of artifice, and it was by artifice that Seraph made his way in the world. He prided himself upon his tact. Now tact, like other forces, may be either baleful or beneficent, according to the purpose which it is made to serve. In the one case, it is a saving grace of manner, the outcome of kindly consideration, used with good effect as an emollient to soften the shocks and jars of everyday life; in the other, it is a treacherous weapon, made to serve selfish purposes regardless of any injury to others which may be involved in its use.

Old Emery did not like the soft spokenness of his eldest son. He had an uneasy suspicion often that Seraph was getting the better of him by management, the woman's way, and a contemptible way in any one, though excusable in women in the days when they were allowed no other lever to move the mass of illogical unreason which they had so often to encounter in their dealings with men; but despicable without excuse in a man, seeing that to his kind has always been accorded the right to have a mind and to use it. When Seraph drove off with that "Thank you, sir," his father's mood changed. He did not deny to himself that Seraph was right about Adnam, but he felt that he had been managed into owning it, and a fit of irritation resulted which made him for a moment a man to be avoided. He shook his stick at Seraph disappearing in the distance, at Adnam out of sight, at things in general, and at himself in particular.

But when a man begins to see himself in fault, he is not far from taking a lenient view of the faults of others.

CHAPTER II

MARCH in the sweet south country, March first month of the year to the Romans, first month of the year to Nature also, it would seem. In February Nature begins to stir in her winter sleep, but in March she awakens, she brings out her garments of

green by degrees, the diaphanous green of the spring, flower-flecked, and calls to the birds and the beasts and to men to come to her court, to sport, to work, to make love, to enjoy.

That bright March morning, on a bank bathed in sunshine, in his father's orchard, Adnam Pratt had stretched himself, and there reclined with a book beside him, apparently doing nothing. He was twenty-one years of age, and could honestly say that he had never done a hard day's work in his life. Yet he had always been occupied. But these incessant occupations had not been work to Adnam Pratt. What is one man's work may, by taste and capacity, be converted into another man's play; and, although Adnam had got through what would have been a fair amount of mental work in the abstract to most men, he had done nothing so far which was not pure pleasure and play to him. He had his own way of attending to his own business, a misleading way, which any one might be excused for mistaking for idleness. As he lay there his mind was alert, and his eyes, moving slowly from object to object, saw what they rested upon, and recorded the details with accuracy and to eminently practical purpose. It was the orchard that occupied most of his attention, but he looked out also over the meadowland beyond to a ridge, thickly crested with firs, and there discovered what he wanted in the rising ground—shelter for the orchard from the east.

It was an old orchard at the end of a large field, and very much neglected. The high wall of the stockyard sheltered it from the north, and offered a fine south aspect for fruit, but both wall-fruit and apple-trees had been left to do what they could for themselves, and what they could, though a good deal, thanks to soil and climate, was nothing compared to what they might have done with a little help.

Adnam's indolent gaze rested upon the old wall for a time, and then went on to the brook which bounded orchard and field on the side opposite to the bank on which he was lying. Beyond the brook was another bank, topped by a high quickset hedge, and beyond that again more meadows, dotted with grazing cattle.

When Adnam's eyes returned from their survey they wandered over the boughs, decorated with lichen and moss, of the gnarled old apple-trees; but no one could have told what im-

pressions he had gathered, or what he might be thinking about, or even if he were thinking at all, so impassive was his fine young face.

He had not inherited the bigness of the Pratts, but his frame was well-knit, and his hands and feet were of a refinement unexpected in a yeoman's son but one generation removed from manual labour. The refinement reappeared in his face, a strong face, unfinished as yet, but with the promise in it, as in his whole person, of fine looks when the growing material was fully rounded to maturity. His long, somewhat heavy-lidded eyes, set well apart, dark grey in colour and liquid as a gem, were remarkable for their steadiness. He was somewhat too fair for a man, but the burnished bronze of his hair, and the good red blood which shone veiled crimson beneath the light cloud of his skin, redeemed his colouring from insipidity. That the lad had a look of breeding about him would have been evident to any one who was a judge of breeding, and had condescended to consider him, but no one in his neighbourhood so far, possessed of the necessary qualification, had ever bestowed a thought upon him with a view to appraising his appearance in that respect, or indeed in any respect, except his mother, who adored him, his half-brother Seraph, who did not love him, and every girl he met. In these last, however, admiration was apt to be heavily discounted by vague resentment; in the good-looking at his indifference to them, and in the plain at the waste of so many advantages, especially in the way of colouring, on a young man.

Through the thick grass on the bank where he lolled, which bounded the orchard, scented violets, purple and white, in profusion, shot up to the light on long slender stalks, and shone, the purple in deep tender contrast, the white with more insistence, against the green. The grateful nostrils of Adnam Pratt dilated to the perfume which came to them in whiffs from the flowers; his steady eyes surveyed the prospect, but without more intelligent thought, apparently, than appears in the eyes of a ruminating beast when it raises its head to look about it. If his mind were busy no one would have suspected it, judging from the expression of his inscrutable face. To an energetic person, charged with anxiety about work to be done, there was everything in his attitude to provoke irritation, and

that was the effect he had produced on his half-brother when he passed him in the orchard awhile ago, and on his father now as he walked towards him down the path leading from the homestead, with determined step, and his deliberate mind shaken up to something like alertness in the unwonted space left in it by the huge block of patience, its habitual tenant, which, for the moment, he had lost.

Yeoman Pratt, as he approached, looked down at his son severely, and slowly shook his head. Adnam looked up at his father placidly, waited until he came close, then gathered himself together, stood up, and took off his cap. There was deference in the act, and something foreign also; one would not have expected it of an English boy.

Old Emery stopped, planted his stout stick firmly in front of him, crossed his hands on the knob, and bent over it. Again he shook his head, but there was a subtle change in the expression of his fine old face. Adnam's act of respect had made for mollification. His father's irritation began to subside, anger gave way to sadness, and more affection than blame appeared in his glance. Still his mouth was firm. He had come to say unpleasant things, and he meant to say them.

But Adnam got in the first word: "Will you sit down and rest, father?" he said, with a courteous movement, as if the bank were his, and it was for him to do the honours.

"Rest!" the old man ejaculated; but his anger had gone out. His irritation had, to begin with, been more with Seraph because he sniffed and shrugged his shoulders than with Adnam, with whom he was in another atmosphere, a more congenial atmosphere—though of course the boy must be brought to book.

Adnam looked down at the impression of his own long length on the rank grass.

"You can sit down yourself if you're tired," his father said contemptuously.

Adnam sat down, with his cap still in his hand, and looked up at his father.

"The first day of the month," old Emery began, "and the first working day of the week, and the first of the morning, and there you lie content on a bed of violets. You're no better than a poet. . . . What's that book you've got there in a paper cover? Poetry, I suppose—some foreign muck."

Adnam drew a blade of grass from its sheath, and put the succulent stem in his mouth. His steady glance wandered along the bank. The rank grass, by its own weight, was flattened in places, and there the violets, also unable to hold themselves upright on their slender stems, hung over, their heavy heads bent downwards towards the footpath, where the sordid ants ran hither and thither, intent on spending their lives in making their living.

"But you like poetry, father," Adnam observed dispassionately.

"Yes, I like poetry," the old man acknowledged. "But poetry isn't a poet. Many a man likes poetry who wouldn't like to see his son a poet. A poet's all feelings like a woman, but he's worse than a woman. A woman does feel for other folks; a poet only feels for himself. Poets are too weak-kneed for this workaday world. They should be kept in close compounds filled with flowers, where the women could go and stroke them."

Adnam smiled. His smile was infectious, and his father turned his head away that he might not be seen to respond. Out of the corner of his eye he caught the glint of his son's bare head which shone in the sunshine the colour of burnished bronze. The lad's beauty moved him. His admiration slipped out unawares: "You're your mother's son," he said—the highest praise he could give him. But he tried to recover the slip, it was not a time to be praising: "You should have been her daughter," he added, making the assertion sound offensive to keep down the underlying affection which threatened to weaken his purpose.

Adnam looked up in his face. "Yes," he said, "I suppose I am my mother's son, but there's more of my father in me than you seem to suspect."

"I'd like to know where you keep it then," the old man growled.

"In reserve," said Adnam, "for my working days."

"Oh, your working days! I much misdoubt me if you are not the kind that lies late abed making big plans until breakfast is over and everybody else has gone to work, and then feels too injured to do anything for the rest of the day, because time was not held up till he was ready to start. It's the early bird that gathers the worm."

"It's possible to be up too early then."

"How's that?"

"The worm——?"

The old man reflected, but saw no way out of the objection. Adnam pulled up another blade of grass, and sucked the stem. "I'm not pretending to know better than you, father," he said, with his young infectious smile. "I know you're right. The worm was not caught for his early rising. He'd been up all night."

The old man chuckled, and then grew grave.

"And is that to be it, my son?" he demanded sadly.

Adnam picked up his cap and looked at the lining.

"That's not to be me," he said casually. "I refuse to be a worm."

The old man considered him for some seconds.

"I should like to know what is to be you," he said at last.

"What are you doing here?"

"Making my fortune."

"You'll be a long time about it at this rate."

"I suppose I shall at any rate."

"And how do you calculate to begin?"

"I have begun."

"Eh?"

"I have begun. That's what I'm doing here. I'm considering. It takes time to consider."

"Considering!" his father ejaculated, as if the hopelessness of the case were confirmed by the word. "Yes, considering—while your brother's hard at work. Look at your brother!"

That neutral-tinted young man being out of sight, Adnam turned his attention to a happy party of piebald pigs, snouting apples from out of the rank herbage under the old apple-trees, remnants of the ungathered autumn crop which had dropped and been left to rot on the ground.

"There are bushels of apples there," said Adnam.

The old man's attention quickened. "Well, what of that?" he demanded.

"They are good cider apples," said Adnam.

"Do you calculate to make cider then?" his father asked sarcastically.

"Yes," Adnam answered without emphasis. "That is what

I was calculating to do when you came up. There are four acres of good orchard here in this field, and eight acres of good ground under grass, and you don't make a penny out of one of them. I was thinking if you'd turn them over to me, and let me have a free hand to make what profit I can out of them—for myself—I'd soon have a different tale to tell."

"Oh—profit—for yourself," the old man gasped. He turned and gazed at the orchard as if what he saw there were new to him.

"Yes," said Adnam, gathering himself up deliberately as he spoke. "Profit—for myself. That's the poetry that appeals to me at present. You said, 'Look at your brother.' I've been looking at him for some time in my own mind. His future is secure. He was born here, he'll live and die here contentedly, as his father's fathers have lived and died for hundreds of years. I don't envy him. It wouldn't have been my life in any case. Money is my call. Money means everything. Money makes you a man among men, and a god among women. I'm going to make money——"

"Out of our old orchard!" old Emery put in with incredulous laughter.

"And the old lay field, yes, with your leave," said Adnam. "Give me a little cash, and the use of these acres for a start, and it won't be my fault if I ever cost you another penny."

His father stood considering: "Why don't you go away," he said at last, "out into the world, like other young men, and make a career for yourself as they do? There'd be some sense in that."

"My mother," said Adnam. "I cannot leave my mother." His father nodded comprehension and approval. "Besides," Adnam continued, "there is sense in what I propose. Give me the land and I'll prove it."

"Oh! You'd begin next week, I suppose?"

"I'd begin this minute," said Adnam.

The old man thumped his stick on the ground, stamped, threw back his head, and laughed gigantically, showing two rows of good strong teeth still perfect. "There's stuff in the lad," he roared. "I do believe there's stuff in the lad. Eh, well!" His delight abated.

"You don't do much with the orchard yourself," Adnam suggested.

"No," his father acknowledged. "I've let it go a bit, and the old field, too. They're the only things I have let go about the place. I'm not a fruit-grower, you see, and we get enough from the trees for the house. And as to the field—why, it's useful to turn a horse into for a rest, or a dry cow—and I like the look of it. It's my park."

Adnam sat up energetically. "Make it my orchard," he said, "the whole twelve acres. I know what to do with them. I promise you shall never regret it."

Old Emery looked at him, looked at the land, and poked holes in the ground with his stick, deeply deliberating.

"I'll take you at your word, Adnam," he said at last. "You're a Pratt for sure, and I'm glad of it; but you're a different make from your brother, and I'm glad of that, too. You're more than a Yeoman Pratt. You're an Aubon Strelletzen; you're your mother's son, and your mother's blood is noble. Follow your bent, my lad, follow your bent. No good ever yet came of thwarting a natural bent."

He broke off, and burst into another fit of gigantic laughter, out of which he came stammering the words: "Profit for myself. That's the poetry that appeals to me at present. O Lord! Well! Well!"

He turned to go, but the book again caught his eye: "What's that foreign muck you've got there?" he asked suspiciously, pointing at it with his stick.

"*Culture des Légumes Intensive et Extensive*," Adnam replied, rising and handing him the book.

Old Emery took it, and read the title himself, as if he doubted his son. Adnam, standing beside him, waited. A great gravity came upon the old man. He put the book into Adnam's hand.

"Your mother's made a scholar of you," he said. "I needn't have had my doubts. I might have known that good would come of it. There's a blessing on all she does, and on all she loves. Her son will be blessed." He took off his hat as he spoke, and raised reverent eyes for a moment to the sky; then, full of thought, went on to make his daily round of the place. At the end of the path he stopped and looked long at the ragged orchard and neglected field in which it stood.

"It will be some time before you make a fortune out of this lot, Adnam, my son, I'm afraid," he called back.

"I can wait," said Adnam.

After his father had passed out of sight, he still stood for some time longer, considering. In him also was the large deliberation of nature, born of the long life of his race on the land. "Without haste, without rest," was the principle, if not the motto, which was to have for result the method of his days.

After a little he went to the farm buildings and returned with scythe and rake, threw off his coat and waistcoat, put on a pair of large leather gloves, and began to mow the rank herbage under the apple-trees. Every now and then he paused to sharpen his scythe, and in the pause he straightened himself and looked about him. There was the strength of steel and the beauty of an immortal in his young spare frame and fine clear features; but, as with the immortals, his steady eyes and mouth remained set in expression, imperturbable, inscrutable. No man would ever discover in Adnam Pratt's face any information which Adnam Pratt did not intend to impart.

CHAPTER III

OLD Emery had returned from his morning walk and was waiting for his dinner. He came in by the front door, which opened into what was called the inner hall, an ample entrance, wainscoted with oak darkened by age. A large window above the broad staircase, like a church window, with diamond panes, embellished it with a soft greeny light. It was sparsely furnished with a narrow table and some chairs, all of old oak. Behind it, shut off by a solid door, were the offices, and in front was the hall proper, the principal living-room of the family. This was a large, moderately high hall, narrow for its width, and wainscoted, like the inner hall, with old oak. The ceiling itself was white, but cross beams, also of dark oak, divided it up into squares. At one end was the open hearth, at the other were three high narrow windows, with comfortable window-seats in their deep embrasures, cushioned with crimson. The curtains were also of crimson, deep and rich in tone and well drawn back so as not to obscure the light, which the small panes in

any case admitted none too generously. Sunk in the recesses between the narrow windows were shelves filled with books from floor to ceiling, old volumes, bound in brown leather for the most part, the possession of which betokened book-loving proclivities for some generations in the Pratt family. In the left-hand corner, looking from the hearth, near one of the windows, and set at an angle to catch the light, was the only modern thing in the hall—a handsome grand piano. The rest of the furniture was old, but of a solid, comfortable appearance. A cultivated taste was shown both in form and colour. Everything had been chosen apparently to harmonise with the paneling. No alien pictures hung on it to spoil the effect. Deep tones prevailed. A continent of turkey carpet of the happy period before the introduction of aniline dyes was set in a sea of polished floor. An old gate-legged table, like a movable island which you might expect to find anywhere but in the centre of the hall, served as a dining table, drawn up to the fire for warmth in winter, or pushed over to the windows for air in summer. The side door, used by old Emery that morning, was about half-way down the hall on the right of the fireplace. It had opened into it direct at one time, but later Pratts, either in better understanding of comfort or in greater fear of fresh air, had enclosed and roofed it in with an oaken screen, which opened at the side next the windows. The door on the left of the hearth leading into the inner hall had been so successfully contrived that, when it was shut, there was no visible break in the paneling, and it was only to be discovered by its wrought-iron handle. Altogether the apartment was in no way what was to be expected in the house of an English yeoman, and it was evident that some imported taste must be responsible for the furnishings and the whole arrangement.

Old Emery stood with his back to the fireplace and his hands clasped behind him, ready for dinner but not impatient. Seraph had also returned. He had followed his father into the hall, and was standing beside the table now as though waiting to take his seat. The dinner was served, and a maid-servant stood ready to remove the covers. The hands of the grandfather clock were close on the stroke of two. All eyes were directed towards it, but with attention rather than impatience, as of those in expectation of something certain. For in that house everything

was done to the moment, everybody knew what to expect, and when, and confidence reigned. As the clock struck two, the door from the inner hall opened deliberately, and there entered a lady who might have come direct from some great feudal castle of the Middle Ages, so old-world were her air and grace and dignity, so compelling her unmistakable habit of command. Yet she was a fragile creature, a woman of forty-five or so, tall, slenderly proportioned, with delicate regular features, dark grey eyes, a pale transparent skin, and abundant hair so light in colour that at the first glance it might have been supposed to owe its fairness to the whitening touch of time. To see this lady was to be able to account for Adnam. He looked like a translation of herself into the first fine flush of early manhood. And it was from her that he had inherited the set expression which was the peculiarity of his face; a similarity, however, which did not illustrate a common characteristic at present, for in him it portended latent caution and energy waiting and watching for opportunity; in her it stood for an habitual sense of the futility of strife and worry and haste. Years had convinced her that "there is no joy but calm"; but in him hot youth was clamouring for "the joy of eventful living." Anything more unexpected in appearance than Adnam's mother as the wife of an English yeoman could hardly have been imagined. In her long black dress, the straight lines of which accentuated the slender grace of her figure as she moved, with the spotless lawn of her kerchief and cuffs, and the loose leather girdle from which depended a jingling bunch of keys, she looked like one of those noble ladies of old, a *chanoinesse*, vowed to religion, but living in the world and taking an active part in the duties of life all the same. And everything about her bore out this suggestion, more especially her ascetic face, which was the face of a mystic, gentle and tender, firm but not severe, with the characteristic eyes, open at their widest when what she saw was beyond the range of their vision.

She glanced at her husband as she entered the hall and her face brightened, but she did not smile. He went to the table at once to place her chair, an attention he never forgot to pay his own lady, though he had been known to omit it in the case of a duchess. Then he went to his place opposite. Seraph was on his left. There were four covers laid. Before they sat down

old Emery tapped the table and looked at Seraph. "Ask a blessing," he said.

Seraph in compliance mumbled, "For what we are going to receive, . . ." irreverently.

His father compressed his lips as he took his seat, and shook his head in disapproval of Seraph's perfunctory tone; but Mrs. Pratt, who had stood with folded hands and an abstracted air, as if engaged in private prayer and unconscious of Seraph's lip-service, made no sign. When they were seated the maid removed the covers and withdrew. Old Emery surveyed the table with the complacency of a hungry man whose appetite is about to be well satisfied. The food was varied and plentiful—fish, flesh and fowl, with appropriate sauces and vegetables; sweets, fruit, cream; bread, butter, cheese and cakes, all on the big table together, and all set among flowers and made appetising with dainty garnishings. Old Emery was one to do justice to good food in the matter of assimilation as well as of consumption, as his fine physique testified; but the degenerate Seraph had the ill-nourished look of a man with a weak digestion. His lanky body was scraggy, and, after eating, his face was apt to assume a libellous red, for he drank nothing but water, as a rule. There were broiled trout in front of the lady of the house, to which she helped her husband and stepson, and then herself. Old Emery watched the graceful movements of her slender white hands as she did so, with the suspicion of a smile, as a man looks with pleasure at a thing he admires.

His second wife was a German lady, *hochgeboren*, the only living representative but one of the younger branch of a family once large and powerful, but now threatened with extinction. Between the elder and younger branches there was a religious feud which had kept them apart for several generations, the elder branch having remained Catholic while the younger ardently adopted the Protestant faith. When Mademoiselle Ursula Aubon Strelletzen's parents died, leaving her penniless, her uncle of the elder branch offered her and her brother a home if she would return to the ancient faith of their family; but she preferred to work for her living, and had come to England as governess in the family of the Duke of Castlefield Saye, who had a favourite place in the near neighbourhood of the Pratts. It was after the death of Emery's first wife that

she had appeared in church, and there he had seen her Sunday after Sunday, fallen in love with her, and determined to marry her; and there she had seen him also, and been attracted by his fine physique and manly bearing, his handsome honest face, his devoutness, and, above all, his kindly attention to his sharp-featured, rather ill-conditioned-looking little boy. She would certainly never have noticed a German in the same station of life, but this attractive, decently educated Englishman, with refinements of manner far in excess of anything to which her own countrymen, even of rank, had as yet been subdued, and with his fine old house and substantial property, she did not recognise as one not born. The difference of race and language made a difference in her attitude. Besides, she saw Emery Pratt in favourable contrast to several of the squires about, and consequently yeoman in her estimation took on the higher significance. And, furthermore, Mademoiselle Strelletzen was lonely, she was romantic, and she was adventurous enough to escape from the uncongenial position of governess to that of wife, wherein, with the instinct and education of a German woman, she naturally expected to find her true vocation and best chance of happiness—especially with a man whom she saw treated with respect by high and low, and of whom she heard nothing but good. Sunday after Sunday she sat in the great family pew, with eyes cast down and a faint flush on her transparent cheeks, conscious of the handsome yeoman's presence; conscious, when the service was over, that he had followed her out and was waiting to see her depart with her two little pupils, Lord Melton and Lord Eustace Brabant; waiting and watching for an excuse to speak, to make her acquaintance. And the opportunity came at last, but not at the church door. It was one spring day, late in the afternoon. She had gone for a walk alone, and wandered into a little wood, attracted by the daffodils with which it was thickly starred. And there, with her hands full of flowers, she met him face to face, and he took off his hat and spoke. It all came about so naturally, so easily, it was just as if they had expected it to happen in that way and had only had to await the moment. The good things in life when they come to us have often this effect of having been expected, as indeed they are in that innermost shrine of our consciousness where the inarticulate heart of our hopes throbs incessantly; and perhaps, thought being creative, it is in answer to our ex-

pectation that they come. It was Emery's wood, and Mademoiselle Strelletzen was trespassing, but he did not tell her so. All he did say, when at last he could speak, for at first he could only stand with his hat in his hand, looking down into her half-frightened face, where the red and the white, alternating, betrayed her emotion—all he could say was, "But I am glad to see you here!"

"And—and I am glad to be here," she had answered, faltering.

Neither of them felt any strangeness once they had spoken. It was as if they had met before and were renewing an old acquaintance. Such love needs no preliminaries that they had not already looked into each other's eyes. There is no word to express it. It finds its food and its satisfaction in nearness, in the long look, the lingering touch. Emery saw her safely back to the Castle that day, and boldly fetched her the next for a drive. He did not leave her a day in doubt about his feelings. She was somewhat alarmed by his impetuosity, but admired him for it, too, and was even thankful that he had proclaimed his intentions at once when she found herself, on her return, forced to face the inevitable scene with the duchess.

The duchess was an amiable little person, who prided herself upon having a high sense of duty, and she really could not allow Mademoiselle Strelletzen to drive about the country alone with Mr. Emery Pratt. "If it had been a gentleman even," said the duchess.

"He is a good man," Mademoiselle ventured.

"Oh, excellent," said the duchess; "but a yeoman. Do not forget that you are *hochgeboren*."

"I have nothing to boast of but my birth," Mademoiselle Strelletzen replied. Her manner was as easy, simple and unpretentious as the duchess's own. "And he doesn't even know of that. Some men with as much as he has would think that they were paying a penniless governess a compliment——"

She met the duchess's eyes steadily, but her blushes were not to be controlled.

"Then he is making love to you!" the duchess exclaimed. "But how do you know that he means to—er—means a compliment?"

"Your grace reminded me that I am well-born," the girl

replied, drawing herself up. "A well-born German girl does not drive about the country alone with a man until she knows that he is paying her a compliment."

The duchess became thoughtful. The first thing to flash through her mind was the loss to her little boys. She knew the Aubon Strelletzen family and the circumstances which had made it necessary for Ursula to work. She admired the girl's staunchness to her religion, and it was she who had suggested that Ursula should make the experiment of trying to teach. She appreciated the advantage to her little boys of having such a governess. Accent and tone and manner perfect; moreover, it appeared that she could teach. Where was such another to be found? There was another thing, too. Position and heredity ruled that the duchess should not trouble herself about governesses in general, but her attitude towards this particular governess was at variance with position and heredity. The circumstance of Ursula's birth counted with her, also the fact that she had known her father and mother, but most of all some quality in the girl herself. They were both young then, and the duchess, from talking to Ursula casually, was insensibly captivated by a mind much stronger and better informed than her own. And there was a still greater bond of union between them than this, an unusual bond between ladies in their respective positions. They were both deeply religious, but Ursula's spiritual nature was developed to an exceptional degree, and the duchess drew sustenance from it for her own, which was comparatively speaking rudimentary. Gradually, in their talks together, she found in Ursula the most congenial companionship she had ever known. How congenial she did not realise at this time, nor, indeed, until Ursula had left the Castle; but thereafter, missing her greatly, she sought her company continually, so that the separation led to an intimacy which was to the duchess a constant solace and source of strength.

But there was no foreshadowing of such a friendship in either of their minds at this interview. The duchess thought of her little boys first of all, but next she thought of Ursula. Her gentle heart was easily touched. The girl's position was forlorn enough—and what better prospect was she likely to have? Emery Pratt was only a yeoman, but he was also a man of high character, as everybody knew; decently educated, too, and of

passable refinement; and undoubtedly well-to-do. What better chance of happiness was this poor girl likely to have, exiled as she was both from country and class? The duchess knew nothing of any career desirable for a woman but marriage, and she was of the generous kind who delight in love and marriage when there is good hope of happiness in prospect for the adventuring pair.

"You will accept him?" she said at last tentatively.

"I have accepted him," the girl replied.

Then the duchess took both her hands and kissed her and their eyes were full of tears.

So Emery Pratt had won his second wife, Adnam's mother, and the marriage had been ideally happy. She was "My lady" to him always, and he was "my man" to her. He had studied German in the early days of their marriage, and they spoke it and read it together habitually. He had learnt it, fearing that it might be a grief to her never to be able to speak her mother tongue, and had been glad to know it later, when the boy began to talk, as otherwise there would have been a barrier between them. Mrs. Pratt had been willing to teach Seraph also, but he would not learn: "English is good enough for me," he snapped at her offer. In his intercourse with his stepmother, although she had always been good to him, the British boor was apt to appear when he was off his guard, but his habitual pose was polite indifference.

His mother had been an anæmic girl of a town stock, the child of tradespeople with impoverished blood, bred in the days when municipal ignorance, mismanagement, and neglect of interest in the health of the community generally was enough to make the microbes in the milk carts stand up on their tails and cheer. She was a showy, astute young milliner, older than Emery, whom she had marked down for pursuit while he was still at the Grammar School in the cathedral town where he was educated, and had captured finally when he was nearing thirty, after an exciting chase. It was his comfortable position that had attracted her; his worth she was incapable of appreciating. Seraph was born some years after the marriage, and she lived long enough to infect him, her only child, with her innate defects of character and of manner, which showed through a thin veneer of gentility acquired, in her case, as a part of the milli-

nery business. Because of his matrimonial experiences, old Emery had developed a greater respect for the influences of heredity than wider evidence on the subject would have warranted. He had seen his showy shop-woman wife, once she had secured an affluent position, rapidly degenerate into an idle, self-indulgent sloven, capable of any sham or mean deceit that occurred to her as likely to further a purpose; and he had seen his lady wife growing in grace and refinement year by year, a high-principled woman, devoted to duty, doing all things decently and in order that it fell to her lot to do; seeing to it that the qualities—such as sincerity, kindness, courtesy—which make for beauty in life should everywhere be in evidence about her. Her rule was of the simplest, the gentlest, but it was the rule of right, and those who came under it and would have resisted it found it inflexible. But such differences of character do not prove that qualities good or bad are inherent in the blood, things neither to be acquired nor eradicated. In childhood heredity may be successfully combated by training and environment; and in later life by knowledge and determination. The Jesuit says, "Give me the child until he is six years old, and then you may do what you like with him"; and the Jesuit knows. By six years old, impressions will have been made upon the child which will last him his life, and Seraph had been under his mother's influence during those first few malleable years. The great advantage of good birth is the better chance of coming under influences which will result in *noblesse oblige*. But the belief that ancient lineage, means and position must result in the production of fine qualities has been heavily discounted by the fact that children born to all these advantages have turned out inferior in character to the children of parents distinguished by nothing but their own integrity. It is probable that in the days to come high-born and low-born will have changed in significance: low-born being applied to the degenerate offspring of an exhausted stock, regardless of social position; and high-born to the inheritors of health and strength, mental, moral, and physical. These things come of principles early inculcated and steadfastly honoured. No man with the right principles is doomed by heredity to any fate without having it in him to thwart his doom if he choose to resist it. To believe otherwise is to pronounce sentence against the evidence. Emery Pratt, like most

people, judged by appearances, and seeing Seraph aping the gentry but looking always like the bad imitation he was, while Adnam without effort gave an air of distinction to his oldest clothes, saw "heredity." And certainly appearances favoured the dogma. But who shall say, in the absence of convincing experiment, that an unscrupulous Adnam, slouching in body and mind, and a high-souled Seraph of manly bearing might not have been made possible by early training, resulting in an interchange of manners and appearance as emphatic as the interchange of characteristics. No one can inherit from the whole of his ancestors; nor need he be wholly dominated by traits descending to him from any one of them. He will have his own personal attributes to nullify these, and his own will to determine what he shall be or shall not be. Dissect the chances of heredity and the fragments scattered to various descendants become too minute to be of much importance. Physical resemblances and tricks of manner, which do not of necessity indicate either faults or qualities are for the most part mere excrescences of no more consequence to the character as a whole than an unusual shade of colour is to those points in a flower which make it a dahlia or a dandelion; and a strong likeness to father or mother does not argue the absence of enough original traits in a man to make him essentially himself. Twenty-two years of married life had transformed Ursula Aubon Strelletzen from a girl with nothing specially distinctive about her into a woman in whom reappeared many of the best traits of her feudal ancestry. During those years she had lived up to a high ideal; had she not done so, feudal characteristics would probably have reappeared all the same, but the bad instead of the good ones; and she would have become one of the worst instead of one of the best of her breed. The moral of which is: Educate, form the character, direct the will. Let us humble ourselves to the wisdom of the observer, who first skimmed the cream from the subject, and served it up in the neat shape of a portable axiom: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

When she had helped herself to broiled trout, Mrs. Pratt looked at the empty chair. "Where is Adnam?" she asked.

The old man had been waiting for the question. He looked up from his plate and answered solemnly, using the second

person singular, as was his wont in English as well as in German when speaking to his wife:

"Thy son is at work."

Seraph stared at his father for a moment, then threw himself back in his chair, and guffawed in the rural manner.

His stepmother, sitting upright at the end of the table, watched the performance, but there was no indication in the expression of her delicate face of what she thought of it.

She unfolded her napkin and carefully spread it out on her knee.

"Eh?" her husband inquired, as if she had spoken, but there was a twinkle in his eye. He understood her silences as well as her speech.

"I did not say anything," she answered.

"Well," he rejoined with large deliberation. "I rather expected thee to have something to say."

"You stated a simple fact. It did not seem to me to call for comment," she explained.

"A simple fact! Adnam at work a simple fact! That's good!" Seraph exclaimed hilariously.

"Adnam has never been idle in his life," she said.

"Well, I don't know what you call idle," Seraph rejoined.

"Probably you don't know what I call work either," she answered, smiling.

"Ay, that's it," old Emery put in, nodding, as if to mark a score to the lady.

"I do know that Adnam has never done a hand's turn worth mentioning in his life," Seraph declared.

Old Emery put down his knife and fork and leant back in his chair. "Excellent fish," he said. "Where did they come from?"

"Adnam caught them early this morning," Mrs. Pratt replied.

The old man nodded again, took up his knife and fork, and went on with his dinner. He had made his point, and was above the pettiness of rubbing it in.

"Huh, sport!" carped Seraph, in a tone which implied that, in his view, sporting habits, even when they did result in excellent fish for dinner, were idleness itself in an aggravating form.

"I was not thinking of manual labour," Adnam's mother

pursued, as if there had been no interruption to her first remark. "I was thinking of headwork. There must be heads to direct the hands."

"Oh!" Seraph ejaculated sardonically. "So Adnam is destined to be a head? My respects to Adnam!"

He glanced furtively from his father to his stepmother, but neither seemed to have heard. Their silence was eloquent enough to Seraph, silence being the barrier which they habitually erected between themselves and him, when they disapproved of his attitude, and as a barrier it was usually effectual. The workings of shifty minds Seraph was quick to follow, but the straightforward thinking of honest people puzzled him. A man's own character is the starting-point of his knowledge of human nature, and it also determines the limits of his comprehension of other characters. A rogue may learn how to impose on other rogues by studying his own vulnerable points, but he finds no clue in these to the defences of honest men. Silence is a powerful weapon, and Seraph feared it as a man would fear a trap in the dark. His parents' silence now left him in doubt as to what direction to take, and he found nothing to oppose to it in the way of further remark. His father spoke next.

"Change the plates," he said.

Seraph rose, put the used plates on a side-table, brought clean ones from the hearth, where they had been placed to keep hot, and the meal proceeded. Mrs. Pratt spoke at last.

"When Adnam takes to regular work," she said to her husband, "it will be his life's work, for which he has been preparing himself all along——"

"By playing football and cricket, and pulling a racing oar," Seraph softly insinuated.

His father made a gesture to stop him. When his lady spoke, which was not often, old Emery insisted that all must listen lest a precious word should be lost.

"By cricket and football, and pulling a racing oar," she proceeded; "by days in the hayfield, harvest field, hunting-field; by diligent study, by solitude, by thought—by prayer."

Old Emery nodded as who should say, "Hear!"

"Then may one ask, since his life's work was begun to-day," Seraph said with affected suavity, "what his life's work is to be?"

He looked at his father as he spoke, and his father leant back

in his chair, and burst out unexpectedly into a fit of gigantic laughter.

Seraph looked disconcerted; his stepmother's face was impenetrable.

"Money-making," Emery spluttered at last. "Money-making. 'I'm going to make money. That's the poetry that appeals to me.'"

"Did Adnam say that?" his mother asked quietly.

"Ay, he said so, thy son," old Emery answered.

"Then Adnam will make money," Adnam's mother said.

"Is it permitted to ask what Adnam is doing by way of a beginning?" Seraph ventured.

"He's cleaning the orchard," his father replied.

"Cleaning the orchard!" Seraph exclaimed. "At so much an hour?"

"In the long run, I gather, unless he's much mistaken," his father replied. Then seeing inquiry in his lady's eyes he explained to her. "Adnam asked me this morning to let him have the twelve-acre field for an experiment."

"What's he going to do with it?" Seraph asked suspiciously.

"Make his fortune," Mrs. Pratt said confidently.

"I'd like to know how!" Seraph muttered.

Adnam's mother was smiling. "You may trust him," she said to her husband. "He will do it if he has told you that he sees his way."

Emery nodded. "He will do it, I believe," he said.

Before his wife spoke he had been doubtful about it, but with her words there came to him that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. He sighed when he had spoken, however, as a man is apt to sigh whose sole guarantee is faith and hope.

Seraph sat with his shoulders hunched up and his head bent over his plate. There was marked dissatisfaction in his attitude. A straightforward man would have expressed it in words, but Seraph was not a straightforward man.

"Then Adnam's independent now," he sniffed at last, "and hasn't come in to dinner to let us know it."

"It is not the first time that Adnam has been absent," his stepmother replied in her quiet, indifferent way. "He knows

that his absence is no inconvenience. I wait for no one but your father."

"He's doing the new broom business, I suppose," Seraph pursued.

There was likelihood in the suggestion, and his father's countenance lost its serenity. This was encouraging, and Seraph followed up his success.

"If muddling in an orchard's the way to make a fortune, it's a new discovery," he remarked. "However, it's only right that Adnam should have his own idea of a good time. He'll be well amused so long as he's allowed to experiment to his heart's content. It may come to something, of course. But even if it comes to nothing, and he has to go out into the world after all, when he's too old to make a career for himself like a man, he'll have had his own idea of a good time, and that's as much as a man can wish."

Old Emery looked up from his plate, and his countenance lowered. Seraph had recalled the objection which crossed his mind when Adnam broached his project; but Adnam's reason for not going further afield at present recurred to him upon reflection and restored his confidence.

"Adnam knows what he's doing," he said. "He has given me his reasons, and I approve of them. So that's enough. Let us hear no more about it. Change the plates and change the subject."

Seraph did as he was bidden, picking his steps in his furtive way from table to side-table and from side-table to fireplace and back again, nodding his head like a camel and hunching his shoulders. His father saw derision in his gait, and was irritated; his stepmother saw anger and opposition, and was uneasy. They had both read his thoughts aright, but neither spoke. Old Emery had no words to waste upon any subject, and his lady knew the value of silence as a weapon, offensive or defensive, when used as occasion may require. Those who would keep the peace must master the habit of holding their peace; it is a habit which, if generally practised, would put an effectual stop to the chronic family affliction of futile disputes.

CHAPTER IV

MEANWHILE Adnam in his Orchard toiled on. It was hard work to mow the long rank grass on the uneven ground under the old apple-trees, and he was unaccustomed to regular manual labour; but he was better equipped for the task than could have been gathered from Seraph's jeering estimate, for he had balanced his life with nice attention to the development of body as well as of mind, and he had made good muscle by varying his hours of sedentary study with active outdoor pursuits. He was good at cricket, football, rowing, and riding. He had made hay, too, in summer, helped with the autumn's harvest, and had learnt to handle a plough. Seraph saw no merit in these labours; on the contrary, he quoted them in evidence of Adnam's want of purpose, and with some show of reason, since Adnam did no more than enough to learn. But Adnam had not done practical farm labour merely for fun. He had had his intention from the first, although he had not mentioned it; and now, when a head full of knowledge and a body hardened to endurance were indispensable, he had both to apply to the task he had set himself.

All the same, he was really marking time just then, looking about him, planning, considering. He did not intend to be a labourer himself, but he wanted to see what might fairly be expected of a labourer in the way of work, and that not for the labourer's sake. His object was to get his money's worth.

The work he was doing was severe for a delicately nurtured lad of twenty-one, but he stuck to it manfully. He worked in shirt and trousers, and the March day was fresh, but there was heat in the sun, and the sweat was soon rolling from every pore as he bent to the rhythmic stroke of the scythe. He stayed away from the family meal at two o'clock to escape the friction of family comments, and worked on until his young appetite became importunate. Then he fetched himself from the kitchen a hunk of bread and cheese, a meat pie, and a jug of cider; and sat down on the bank among the violets to eat and to cogitate at his ease. His hands were blistered and sore, and his back was aching, but he had done as much as he could

expect of himself for the day. He was not at all of the sort who make a beginning by overdoing it, and then slack off for the rest of the time. Besides, thought had to be put into the undertaking as well as manual labour, and it was to the department of thought that he meant to confine his energies. When he had eaten, he spent a little more time tramping about measuring, calculating, considering.

The field was well chosen for his purpose. There was water, for one thing; a delicious stream fresh from the moors, which supplied the house, and, having done its duty there, played merrily past Adnam's Orchard, on his side of the fence, skirting his acres, on its way to the sea. To the north the small demesne was bounded by the high wall of the stockyard and the farm buildings, at right angles to which were the dwelling-house and gardens; and high behind, all the land sloped up to the moors. To the south was flat pasture and a dense fir wood, beyond which, above the tree-tops, a silver streak on the distant horizon, glimmered the sea. To the east were sheltering hills; to the west, beyond the brook, was undulating pasture and arable land, divided into fields by luxuriant quickset hedges plentifully besprinkled with forest trees that seemed to have strayed from the woods, which, rising in a gentle slope, on this side bounded the view. No lovelier or more fertile region could well be imagined. Artist and agriculturist must have delighted alike, from their different points of view, in the outlook. Nevertheless, the lover of his kind would have felt something sadly wanting to perfect his sense of satisfaction in the scene. It was not that the green of the pastures was far in excess of the brown patches of arable land, or that the colour owed its vividness less to rich grass for grazing than to rank weeds self-sown on ill-drained neglected acres. Seen from a distance, climbing woods, running water, and cool green pastures, blending with the splashes of brown harmoniously, were full of promise to the eye. But of unappreciated promise. The eye might be satisfied with the prospect, but the mind was not, for it was as if nature thereabouts were offering her hand to man in friendship all the time, and man had refused to take it. What an observer from the crowded centres of life must have felt above any other impression, marring the whole, was the loneliness. As far as the eye could reach from Adnam's

Orchard, there was not the sign of an inhabited house; no thread of smoke from a cottage chimney, no companionable bark of a dog in the distance, nor other evidence of human habitation. The whole beautiful region was a green desert, abandoned of man, left to the beasts.

But it did not strike Adnam as desolate. In his time it had always been so, and no personal necessity as yet had driven him to feel it desirable that it should be otherwise.

His inspection brought him back to the bank where the violets grew, and he stood there awhile, eyeing it thoughtfully up and down, with his dual consciousness busy savouring the fragrance and rejoicing in the beauty of the flowers, and at the same time appraising their value as a marketable commodity. Thence he went up the narrow path to inspect the old stone wall which bounded the stockyard. The accumulation of years, collecting in the yard, has raised it several feet above the Orchard field. On Adnam's side the ground was encumbered with great dock weeds, stinging nettles, old pots and pans, oyster shells, broken crockery, fragments of bricks, scraps of clothing, and all the unsavoury rubbish which collects on neglected spots close to the dwellings of men. The lad's gorge rose at the sight, though his face remained set firm, and he deliberately finished the inspection he had come to make. At one point he cleared a space with his feet by trampling down the luxuriant growth of weeds, and kicking aside the rubbish. Here, with a piece of chalk, he made a mark on the wall; by piercing it at this point, sewage might be drained from the yard above into a pit prepared for the purpose.

He continued his inspection of the wall to the other side of the Orchard, and then, turning, he followed the course of the brook south to the opposite corner of the field, where it had paused to make a pool for itself before it passed on to the pasture beyond. The stream came leaping down in miniature cascades, a merry shallow thing, fuming and fussing over a bed of craggy rocklets which shone brown-green with aquatic plants through the bright clear water. At this corner, from the opposite side, a great beech-tree spread out its budding branches over the pool protectingly. Adnam looked at the beautiful old tree. It was out of his boundary, safe from any utilitarian consideration that might have driven him to sacrifice it; and

he was glad that it was. For in his soul the sense of beauty had been deeply implanted, there to abide with a sordid desire for gain, incongruously, like an ill-mated pair, who spoil each other's pleasure in life involuntarily. Standing there, with the babble of the brook, as it came tumbling down over its rocky bed, making music in his ears, he saw in his mind's eye the neglected acres, not as they were, but as he intended that they should be. The greed of gold was as a spur driven into him by the urging of his strong young manhood, clamouring for the power to enjoy—not money for money's sake, he would have said, but money for what it could procure. Yet it was in his nature to enjoy as he went along, and to enjoy everything, work as well as play, the exertion that fatigues as much as the rest that refreshes; the time of purposeful endeavour equally with the leisure moment of idle relaxation. And now, when how to make money was the all-absorbing question, the pure joy of life also bubbled up in him, claiming his attention from his plans. The voice of the running water beguiled him, and sensation for the moment banished thought. He felt the shadow of the great tree, sheltering the clear still pool, as a thing of spiritual import. He felt the white loveliness of sea-birds passing overhead from their feeding-grounds inland towards the belt of dark firs which hid the sea from his view; and dropped from exaltation, because, as he crossed the neglected Orchard, the humours of the piebald pigs, snouting over, with grunted comments, the swaths of rank grass which had fallen to his scythe, ousted with amusement every other impression. Adnam was a child of the old age of the world, a complex creature, capable of living two lives intensely, the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit, and even of living them both at once on occasion, like a revivalist, into whose ecstasy of adoration the senses intrude with a passionate claim for satisfaction.

These preliminary labours were an aid to thought, and for a few days he pursued them mechanically. Then one evening towards sunset, having bathed, he dressed himself carefully enough to merit, if judged by his appearance, Seraph's reproach of never having done a day's work in his life, and set out to execute one of his plans. He was on business intent, but not so intent as to be unobservant of the way he went. There was inspection in the glances he gave to the pastures as he passed,

neglected looking pastures for the most part, ill-dressed and weedy, and but sparsely sprinkled with cattle. Pratt's Place stood back from the highway, and was reached by a private road, and these pastures were not on his father's land. They belonged to the Pointz estate, one of the largest and worst cultivated properties in the neighbourhood, but, also, partly on this account, one of the most picturesque. When the Duchess of Castlefield Saye was at the Castle, Pointz was her favourite drive. She used to wax eloquent about the wild landscape; and the tangled beauty of the tall, over-grown hedges was her special delight. She would bring friends, who were staying with her, to admire it, and they all said, "How very lovely!" But none of them ever looked over the hedges at the fields full of weeds beyond. The only significance of the picture to them was the pleasure it gave them.

Adnam's way was through the pine wood which sheltered his Orchard acres from the sea. Deep in the wood four roads met and crossed, splendid avenues, unfenced, and with broad margins of springy turf, grand for a gallop. Here Adnam paused and looked about him. In front of him the road he was following wound out of sight among the trees, but those on either hand stretched straight, save for the undulations of the ground, to the vanishing-point. On his left there was not a single living thing to be seen, but on the road to the right, in the far distance, he noticed a speck. It might have been a man or an animal, he could not distinguish; but an impression, as of something moving towards him, remained on his mind's eye as he pursued his way.

It was twilight among the trees. The fragrance of the pines, double distilled by the warm sunshine during the day, was strong in the air. The thick soft carpet of pine-needles was grateful to tired feet. There were creakings and rustlings among the branches, as the light breeze stirred them fitfully; an occasional caw from a passing rook, and calls of other birds; and, under these intermittent sounds, was distinctly audible, though not insistent, the incessant murmur of the sea. But, presently, Adnam's ear was caught by another sound, a faint thud at first, hurried, rhythmic, growing rapidly more distinct, until he recognised it at last as the hoof-beats of a horse coming after him at full gallop. Thinking it was a runaway, he stopped and turned.

The horse was ridden by a slender young girl. Her habit was rucked up, her hair was loose, her hat hung on a storm-rope down her back; but that she was master of her mount was evident by the vigour with which she was plying whip and spur. She rode at Adnam direct, and laughed to see him jump out of her way. But before she came abreast of him, her whip flew out of her hand. Reining up in the same reckless way that she had ridden, she threw her horse on his haunches. As he staggered to right himself, she called to Adnam over her shoulder peremptorily: "Here, I say, you—boy—pick up my whip." Adnam looked at her imperturbably.

"Pick it up, do you hear, boy," she reiterated.

"Want's a word—girl," he rejoined without emphasis.

"Don't be an ass, sir."

"I can't, ma'am," with unruffled composure.

"No impudence, you great lout of a fellow."

"Take back your own impudence then, you squally female."

"Female—how dare you?"

She sprang from her horse, seized the whip, and made a feint as if she were going to strike him. He looked at her stolidly.

The girl lowered her whip and looked at him: "Are you wooden?" she demanded.

"I'm disgusted," he answered.

"You don't show it much," she said, going close up to inspect him. "You could say it's a fine day in the same tone, and look at the weather with the same expression. You must be an auto—auto—"

"Automaton," he suggested.

"Yes, automaton—if that's the thing that isn't alive, and moves and does things as if it were."

She stopped and they stood for a little, like two angry cats, inspecting each other. Adnam's first impression was of black eyes under a fuzzy mop of fair hair. The contrast was striking, but the eyes were not black. They were really of the very deepest blue. In certain lights, or it may have been certain moods, there was a glint in them of dark sapphire. The colour came as a surprise to new acquaintances, and had the effect of a revelation of something unexpected in her character—a half revelation which left them doubtful about her. The mouth was handsome, but it contradicted the eyes when you came to know both. It was the mouth of a sensualist, the eyes, when

not wickedly dancing, showed spirituality. Taking the eyes and the mouth together, a physiognomist would have known that here was a dual nature. Her eyebrows were a fine stroke of black on a broad low forehead, her teeth small, white, and even; her complexion delicately fair. Her little nondescript nose tended slightly upwards. Physically she was a lithe creature, about sixteen, above the middle size, or apparently so by reason of her upright carriage, and the extreme slenderness of her immature figure. Degeneration showed in her hands and feet, which were somewhat too small for her height, but both were beautifully formed, and the whiteness of her well-kept hands betokened a fastidious physical refinement. Her movements corresponded to her mind; both were agile and apt to be wild at times. Her chief beauty was her colouring, but she promised already to be a graceful woman of the willowy kind, one whose superfluous flesh is all burnt up by the energy and range of her various emotions. Of her social position there could be no doubt. Race showed in every tone and feature. She came of the ruling caste. Her mother was a Brabant, a cousin of the present Duke of Castlefield Saye. Her father was born Kedlock of Kedlock Wyld, which had been in the family a thousand years—and went out of it in payment of a gambling debt of his, as so many other fine properties have gone when they fell into the hands of a poor, self-indulgent thing of a man, with no principle to keep him straight, no sense of responsibility, or conception that honour required him to regard his possessions as held in trust for his family.

Adnam's inspection of the girl ended in an infectious smile. She looked up in his face intently. Then her colour rose, and she began to laugh.

"You are a very pretty fellow," she said, "if only you were alive. I should like to make you look alive."

Just then the hoof-beats of another horse could be heard, thudding on the springy turf, and coming towards them, but out of sight as yet on the other road.

"I must make you feel," she cried, mischief incarnate dancing in her sparkling eyes, "and there's only a moment."

As she spoke, she sprang at him, clasped her arms round his neck and kissed him on the mouth; and then, as he drew back his head, under his chin.

"Let me go," he exclaimed, trying to unclasp her hands from his neck. She held on tight.

"Let me go," he gasped, his adolescent modesty in revolt. "There's some one coming."

"I know," she said. "I'm going to hold you, and kiss you, till he comes. Then I shall pretend you were kissing me, and then there'll be a fight."

The trees hid the horse on the other road but it was close to them now, and a voice called: "Hullo, Lena! Lena! Are you there?"

She answered with a shrill "Coo-ee!"

Adnam, in desperation, wrenched her hands from his neck, and flung her off.

She was convulsed with laughter: "You're nice to kiss. I said I'd make you feel. You're alive now, I think," she managed to articulate.

Adnam's face was crimson, his eyes ablaze with anger: "You're a—you're a *hussy*," he exclaimed.

"You're ridiculous," she retorted, putting her whip between her teeth as a preliminary to twisting up her hair.

The horseman had turned the corner, and was riding up to them. He was a dark young man, very spick-and-span in his riding suit, and with a look of breeding about him which, in its points, resembled the points of his thoroughbred horse. As he pulled up, he adjusted a single eyeglass in his right eye, and greeted Adnam as an old acquaintance.

"Eustace!" Adnam had exclaimed as he recognised him. "I didn't know you were back. Have the duke and duchess arrived?"

"No—" he spoke with a slight impediment in his speech—"only Ninian and me as yet. I came—er—as escort to this young lady. She is—er—going to live at the Castle—now—with her—her father, Colonel Kedlock, you know. Rest of the party—coming—date not yet—er—fixed. Lena, let me introduce— Adnam—er—I want to present you to—er—Miss Lena Kedlock."

"Miss Kedlock, if you please."

"You forget your old aunt."

"I'm the only child of the eldest son in the direct line."

"I beg your—er—pardon, Miss Kedlock." He took off his

hat and made her a bow. "It's too bad of you," he complained. "Why did you—er—make a bolt of it like that? Have you had a spill?"

"No," she answered innocently, pulling her hat from behind her by the storm-rope as she spoke, and carefully adjusting it. "I dropped my whip, and then I dismounted to pick it up." Adnam was standing his ground, ready to meet the threatened accusation. "Where's my horse?" she broke off.

They looked about them, but the horse had disappeared. The young horseman prepared to dismount, but Adnam stopped him. "I'll find him," he said, and, guided by the hoof-marks, followed him into the wood.

"Who's your friend?" the girl asked, looking after Adnam.

"Adnam Pratt? Oh—he's one of the Pratts."

"Who are the Pratts?"

"Yeomen—well-to-do people."

"He looks like a gentleman."

"His mother is—er—a lady. Used to be our governess. Mademoiselle Ursula Aubon Strelletzen. Taught me my A B C—"

"Distinguished woman!"

"For which—er—I shall be everlastingly ungrateful to her," he pursued unmoved. "His father is—er—a good old sort."

"What's he?"

"Adnam?"

"If that is his honourable name."

"Plays cricket. Also the violin. His mother and mine are great chums. Mamma is devoted to Mrs. Pratt."

Adnam returned with the horse, and helped the girl to mount.

"I am much obliged to you," she said formally, but with a wicked twinkle in her mischievous eyes which brought the colour up to Adnam's forehead. "If I can do anything for you at any time to show my appreciation of your kindness, I shall be only too glad—and so will Lord Eustace, I am sure."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Eustace exclaimed. "Don't Lord me to Adnam. No need of that sort of—er—rot between us. We have been—er—in the habit of punching each other's—er—heads—all our lives."

Adnam turned off down a by-path. As he went his way,

deep into the wood, he bent his young brows upon the incident, trying to make it fit in with such knowledge of possibilities as he possessed; but he found it unthinkable in terms of everyday life. It was a page of old romance. The fairy girl, with malice and magic at command; the dark enchanted wood; himself the traveller. It was not an episode to think about at all, but to feel—an exhilarating stimulant which caused his heart to expand, his pulse to throb pleasantly, his pace to quicken, his muscles to relax from the ache and strain of the day's hard labour. He held his cap in his hand, and looked on ahead, and up, and beyond, through the dark pine boughs that barred the lingering crimson of the sunset sky. Her words were forgotten. Their sharpness had been padded by the dangerously soft, caressing quality of her voice, and it was the voice he felt, as we feel music in the recollection.

It was a perfect moment for Adnam while it lasted, but it was only a moment. When he came out of the enchanted wood on to the prosaic high road the poetry dropped from him, and was left behind. He was going to see old Ellery Banks at Red Rose Farm on business; and now to business he steadily set his resolute mind.

CHAPTER V

ELLERY BANKS was a small farmer, a tenant of Squire Appleton Pointz. With the help of two of his sons he cultivated a hundred acres of good wholesome land. He had been married three times. By his first wife he had had three sons. His second wife had died at the birth of a baby girl, after a few months of marriage. His third wife, who still survived, had had five children, two sons and three daughters. Ellery cultivated his land "on the clumsy antiquated system of production for use rather than production for profit," because of the number he had to feed, and he had done so rather too successfully, if anything, for he had had his rent raised twice by way of reward; but he had brought up a fine family of nine, five sons and four daughters, reared on good nourishing food, with plenty of milk, a necessity which had been almost unprocurable for years past by the labourers in the villages round about, where the children

were growing up weakly for the lack of it, in spite of the fine air; with teeth that decayed early, and that general want of stamina which is a sure indication of degeneracy in the race. Rulers and governors had met the symptoms by obligingly lowering the standard of height for men in the army, and had troubled themselves no further in the matter; to have pursued the consequence to its cause for the purpose of preventing it was hardly to be expected of them in a land where those who cheerfully adapt themselves to well-established evils gain the credit of optimism as well as the comfort of convenience, and the respected character of thoroughgoing good Conservatives.

Red Rose Farm, which was little better than a big cottage, had been ill-adapted to the rearing of a large family, but Ellery had petitioned in vain to have it enlarged. Standing on a high bank at a sharp angle of the road, and visible from whichever direction you came, with its flower-garden in front, its high thatched roof, its rustic porch, and lattice windows with diamond panes, all curtained with fragrant creepers wherever a fragrant creeper could climb, it was such a picturesque little place no one of any taste could have had the heart to alter it—so said the duchess, and the neighbouring gentry cordially agreed; and all the more cordially because Red Rose Farm was a pretty object for a drive for London guests, who loved to sketch it, and photograph it, and sentimentalise about it and the Simple Life, when the Simple Life became the last luxury of fashionable talk. Young ladies doted on the dear little windows with diamond panes, and especially upon the one in the thatch of the high-pitched roof, and begged Mrs. Pointz not to have it altered. Mrs. Pointz was the person to appeal to in such matters, Mrs. Pointz and Clutterbuck the agent. The Squire was always understood to be too busy to be troubled; but he was a pleasant spoken gentleman enough—when you didn't cross him.

The loft in the roof with bare rafters, dripping damp in winter and stifling in summer, with neither light nor air enough from the dear little window, was where the boys had to sleep. As they grew up and their numbers increased Ellery had sued humbly for more accommodation, but Mr. Clutterbuck pointed to the condition of the boys to prove that it was not necessary.

He said they were fine lads because of the conditions under which they had been brought up, and Mrs. Pointz agreed; and when Ellery declared that if they were fine lads it was in spite of the conditions, Mrs. Pointz and Clutterbuck said it was just like the British farmer, never content. There was no use going to the Squire; he would only have referred Ellery to Clutterbuck. The Squire never troubled about the condition of his tenants so long as their money was forthcoming to supply his own wants, and Ellery's money had always been forthcoming at the appointed time. Nothing at all on the subject of social service, housing, or the management of property, had been included in the Squire's education; all that he had learnt was the amount that he might hope to inherit. He used to talk about his responsibilities, which showed that he had somehow managed to pick up an inkling of the existence of these abstract phenomena; but it was to be gathered from his conversation that he supposed the principal responsibility of great landowners to consist in keeping the lower orders in their proper place by dint of refusing to do for them anything for which they might beg. The bare fact of their requiring a change in their circumstances was held to be a threatening symptom which must be firmly handled or heaven only knew what they might be asking for next. Whether the change desired might be a change for the better for landlord as well as for tenant was never considered until the tenant, unaided, had improved his holding, when the landlord of course stepped in, as was his right, and raised the rent. But the unpopularity which had fallen upon agriculture as a means of livelihood, and the desertion of the land by the peasantry, were not attributed to this kind of encouragement. The disastrous abandonment of the countryside was held to be entirely accounted for by the reprehensible passion for amusement which makes the town attractive to the lazy labourers of these degenerate days.

When Adnam came in sight of Red Rose Farm he looked up expectantly. The lattice window beside the porch on the left stood open wide, and, framed in the aperture, Adnam saw what he expected to see, the head of a girl. Without the head of a girl the poem of Red Rose Farm would have been incomplete; but with this particular head it was more than complete, it was perfect. For it was a beautiful head. A well-shaped head on

a woman is rare beauty, or, at all events, a beauty rarely seen, since the custom has been to dress the hair so as to disguise the shape of the head effectually. Ella Banks dressed her hair as if she knew better. Not that she did know better. Her fine feeling for form was innate, as, indeed, a fine feeling for form has to be when it exists at all in a nation which cultivates its gross taste for conventional deformity on every hoarding. If it were merely an appetite for ugliness that had to be satisfied, there would be no starvation in Old England. Ella's hair was black, black of the tint which in certain lights glows red. It was hair of the finest texture, glossy, abundant, with a natural wave in it. It owed its gloss and luxuriance to her fastidious care of it, to the time she gave to the brushing; the doing was easy and simple enough—parted in the middle, low on the forehead, turned up over the ears which it half concealed, and fastened in a heavy coil low on her neck—but the effect would have satisfied a Greek sculptor of the best period.

When Adnam, looking up, saw the pure, pale profile and beautiful bent head at the lattice-window, his heart expanded with a sense of satisfaction as at a picture that pleases.

Ella raised her head at the sound of his step and smiled: "The door is open," she said.

He hung his hat on a peg in the little passage, then entered the room in which she was sitting. She greeted him without rising on account of the lace-pillow she held on her lap; the pillow also accounted for the bent head as he had seen it from the road.

"I hardly dare look at you," she said, "for fear of upsetting my bobbins."

"Pray don't," he said.

"Have you come to help me with my German?"

"I've come to see your father and Robert on business."

He stood looking down at the gossamer web on the pillow. It was a large piece of lace on which she was engaged, but only a small corner of it could be seen, the rest being sewed up in fine linen to protect it.

"You're working late to-day," he said. "Surely the light has gone?"

"Almost," she answered. "I've been catching the last

gleam. I'm excited to-day. I could not give up. Just think, it's all but finished!" She removed the covering as she spoke, and displayed the lace.

"How exquisite!" he exclaimed. "And how you have got on! You work at it as if you were working for your life."

"And so I am," she said; "for the life I mean to have."

"Then you, too, mean to have a life?"

"I do," she answered. "That surprises you? Because I am a girl, I suppose!"

"Girls are not thought to be purposeful," he acknowledged.

"They are expected to sit still and wait," she suggested with a curl of her lip.

"All things come to those who wait," Adnam reminded her.

"My version is, All things come to those who wait, but they come too late. Moral: Don't wait. You are not going to wait!"

"No," Adnam answered decidedly. "I mean to be up and doing. But girls are different."

"This girl is not going to be different," she declared. She spoke without emphasis, but the rich fulness of her voice and the calm of her utterance lent intensity to all that she said. "Do sit down. Father will be here directly," she added.

He sat down a little behind her, and watched her folding up her work. The light had gone.

From the position of the house, just at the angle where the road turned sharply, she could see down it both ways, and she sat now with her hands folded on the lace pillow, looking out. Hers was a face on which any one, with a sense of beauty, man or woman, must have dwelt with delight, and Adnam had the sense of beauty. At first he contemplated her with passionless pleasure, as one contemplates a flower which stimulates the sense of beauty purely. But presently he looked more concerned than pleased. The white delicacy of her smooth transparent skin was unbroken by the slightest tinge of colour. Her deep blue eyes glittered feverishly. She had worked to the limit of her strength, and her nerves were racked with the irritation of extreme fatigue.

"Don't look at me, Adnam," she broke out suddenly. "It makes me cross."

"You are dead beat," he said.

She acquiesced with a sigh, and her hands dropped off the pillow. He took it from her, and put it away in a cupboard where she kept her work. She did not thank him; she was unaware of the attention. Her eyes were fixed on a horseman who was riding towards her at a leisurely pace. A faint flush tinged her cheeks.

The rider looked up at the window from the moment he came in sight. He was a slender young man, of dark complexion, with straight black hair, and a slight moustache. It was a clear-cut, well-bred, handsome face, but monotonous; a face in which there was nothing new to discover after the first acquaintance. He continued to look up at Ella as he approached, and turned his head to look back after he had passed; but there was no greeting between them. Each had looked at the other with curious gravity; that was all.

"Ninian," Adnam exclaimed, when he recognised him.

"Ninian Brabant—Lord Melton," Ella said meditatively, as if she were trying the names to see which she liked best.

She watched him out of sight, then rose; and she and Adnam looked at each other. The day had changed for both of them. She was content. Her fatigue seemed suddenly to have passed off. He was puzzled—puzzled by something he felt; a sensation he could not define; a sensation as of things gone wrong. Indelible impressions may be made on the mind, as a man may be wounded in battle, without consciousness at the moment of what has occurred. We go on with what we are doing at the time as if nothing had happened, and it is only afterwards that the significance of the impression is realised; long afterwards, it may be.

"I saw Eustace just now," Adnam said, by way of saying something to restore his own equanimity.

"Then the family is back?" Ella rejoined eagerly.

"No," he answered; "but they may come any day. Why do you ask?"

"My lace, of course. I want to show it to the duchess."

The sound of a man's voice singing blithely in the back premises caught her attention. "There's father," she said. "I'll send him to you."

She left Adnam with a leisurely step, and a few minutes

later her father appeared, in his stockinged feet. On the threshold he danced a little jig and sang:

*“ ‘ O farmers’ lads are bonny, bonny lads,
And farmers’ lads are bonny;
The whole of the day
Raking in the hay,
I likes ’em best of onny.’ ”*

He had the figure of a turnip radish, and the performance was most undignified, but funny. Adnam viewed it, however, with unmoved gravity.

“Grand weather for work,” the performer broke off with sly intention, Adnam’s character for idleness being the common talk of the countryside.

Ellery Banks was a man of sixty, short and stout, yet jerky in every movement as if he were hung upon wires. His head was covered with a thick shock of hair, once red but now powdery in appearance, with the red showing through the white, as if the powder had been imperfectly applied. His round, clean-shaven face was bland in expression at the first glance, but on close acquaintance it might have been seen that the shrewd observant eyes contradicted the levity of the mobile mouth. A more unlikely father for Ella no one could have imagined. He was the sort of father to provoke speculation with regard to the mother. They not only looked as if they belonged to different classes and different centuries, but to different nations; she to some fine-featured, clear-skinned classic race, he a nondescript Norman-Saxon-and-Dane. She was the daughter of his second wife, who had died at her birth. Her maternal grandmother, living in another part of the country, had brought her up and taught her the lace-making. Her father had wished to have her at home when she was about eleven, but Ella was too much for her stepmother, and he had only found it possible to keep them together for short periods until recently, when the grandmother died, and Ella had no choice but to live with them. But now that she was grown up she was able to show them that they might all live together in peace by letting her have her own way. She struck against household drudgery,

took the farm parlour for her work-room, minded her own business of lace-making, and lived her own life more like a lodger than a daughter of the house, Flipperty (the name by which her father was generally known) aiding and abetting her.

"Grand weather for work," he repeated now, with a sly twinkle.

"I found it hot," Adnam answered.

"Hot!" Ellery exclaimed, surprised out of all subtlety; "why, what were you doing?"

"Setting the Orchard to rights."

Ellery stopped dead short, and took his stubbly chin in his hand. "You—been—settin' the Orchard—to rights," he slowly articulated, his shrewd eyes questioning; "what's come to you?"

"What you call work," said Adnam.

"Eh!" Ellery ejaculated; then pulled himself up to reflect, with eyes still intently observant. "That's good," he said at last; "that's good, my boy. Go on and prosper. But tell us about it. When did the call come? Is it a young lady?"

Adnam ignored the facetious query. "The call came long ago and was answered," he said; "only no one heard it but my mother and myself; and no one else would have understood it if they had heard. First of all it was a call to prepare; and then came the call to begin. I have begun."

"On your father's Orchard."

"On my own Orchard. My father has given me the whole field to try my hand on. I came to tell you. And I came to ask you—"

"Ask away," Ellery interrupted, sitting down in a windsor chair, crossing his stockinged feet, and fixing his eyes with interest on his wriggling toes. He was up again in an instant, however, and off to fetch his pipe. He had been nicknamed Flipperty because of these jerky ways of his, but was none the less respected; people set his industry against his jigginess, and found a large balance in his favour. The jigginess passed for a mere matter of manner, and manners were not of much account in those parts, experience having taught that manner is as often a mask as an indication of character. "Oh, Ellery Banks, he's flipperty," old Jabez Ryecote, once said of him tolerantly; "an' why shouldn't 'e be if it do 'im good? 'E lies no later 'i

bed o' mornin's for all 'is jigging to t' fiddle of a night. An' look at Andrew Stunte wot don't jig never, an' sits solemn over 'is beer like's if it were a manure took to noorish 'is nat'ral stupidity. Queer thing beer. Some men it sours, some it crazes, and some it sets jest right. Andrew Stunte's a man as nothing sets jest right. 'E's a dull dog. Gie me a man as can larf 'arty, and sorter play. If you'd 'ave a man work, let 'im play; the better 'e plays the 'arder 'e'll work. It's yer dull dogs as does no good."

Ellery returned in a remarkable pair of carpet slippers, settled his rotund person in the windsor armchair, and filled his pipe. "Ask away," he repeated. "What do you want?"

"Men," said Adnam.

Ellery's face dropped. He held his pipe suspended in one hand, and an unlit match in the other.

"Men!" he ejaculated. "What for?"

"Spade work," Adnam answered stolidly.

Ellery reflected. "You know what you want at all events," he said at last; "and that's something. It's half way towards getting what you want, one might say, if what you want's to be had; but men—! and for spade work, hereabouts!" He waved the match and the pipe round and round, as if to express himself overwhelmed by the impossibility.

"You have five sons," said Adnam suggestively.

"I have." Ellery struck the match and lit his pipe. "And where are they?" He punctuated the question with a puff of smoke, and the answers as he uttered them. "Three of them are in London; one bricklaying, one house-painting, one unemployed. Two here, helping me on the farm. But there'll only be one in another month, for Bob, he's going too. And for why? For the same reason the others has gone, and one reason more. He want's to marry, and he can't even get a shed in the place to set up a bedstead in. And if he could, what is the prospect? There's no prospect for a man here on the land. Robert's a farmer. His heart's in the land. He'll never be good at anything else, and he can't get a rood for himself hereabouts. There's enough lying waste here at Pointz, but the Squire won't let a man have a small holding, and even if he would, where's the man to live? There isn't a house to be had with suitable acres about it. And do you suppose the Squire

'ud build? Not he!" Ellery puffed at his pipe after this announcement to soothe his mind.

"And that's not true either," he resumed. "There is a prospect. And a prospect that's certain enough. A prospect of hard labour until he's a broken man, and then the workhouse for his pains." He puffed and puffed again. "Yes. Robert's going, and Robert's a right of it. If Richard went too, I'd say nothing. But Richard's dead stuck on standing by me and Red Rose Farm. I tell him it's a risk. What is he here? Just a labourer. And the only thing in life a labourer's sure of is the rheumatics. He hopes to come after me on the farm, Richard does, but will he? What are the chances? They've raised the rent on me twice, half my little profit's all swallowed up; if they raise it again, I shall be bankrupt. Men!" he broke off bitterly. "It's not men the landlords should have to grind; it's machines that can live on coal, and be thrown on the dust heap when they're worn out. You'll get no men here, Adnam, my son. Have you no other hope?"

"I shall get men," said Adnam. "I want Robert to stay and work for me; and there's Luke unemployed. It's no speculation. I know what I'm doing."

"Do you, indeed?" said Ellery, somewhat sarcastically. "I'd like to know what there is to be done with an old orchard that hasn't had a knife in it or a load of manure for years; and a lay field that's no good for grass, nor even for mushrooms. You might put bulbs down in the Orchard among the trees, and sell little bookays to the maids in the spring, to be sure. Or you might dig up the grass and put in short-rooted vegetables, turnips, cabbage, spinach, broad beans, such as don't take much from the soil. There's a small profit to be made on such like. And there's the apples. They is good old trees if they had attention. But what you'd do with the old lay field, foul as it is—well, I'd like to know!"

"I'll clean it first," said Adnam. "It's full of deep-rooted hardy perennials, dock, thistle, and nettles. I'll turn their roots up with the plough, and trust to the sun. The sun's the thing to kill them. With skilled labour, hand hoeing, and the spade, I'll have the field clean in no time, and make a profit on it by next spring. See here—" he took a plan from his pocket, spread it out, and gave it to Ellery, who drew up his chair to the round

table in the middle of the room, laid out the plan on it, and studied it in silence for some time, his own face being a study the while in changes of expression. Adnam watched the smiling incredulity with which Ellery began to inspect the plan, give way to interest, and interest to animation.

"Here's glass," Ellery said at last.

"Yes," said Adnam. "Glass in plenty. There was a man made a start on this system at Chilton, but he's just dead, and his glass is to be sold. I'm going to buy up the whole of his plant. It'll go for a song, I expect. He was a Frenchman, and had the laugh against him, and didn't live long enough to have it on his side. There'll be no competition for his glass. His loss will be my gain."

Ellery was still studying the plan. "It's a sort of market-gardening," he made out finally.

"It's Intensive Culture," Adnam answered. "And there's six hundred pounds profit an acre to be made at it on this soil and in this climate, with such a market as Closeminster near enough to hand; six hundred pounds profit an acre on twelve acres—and more, perhaps, while I'm first in the field. But I must have men. I must have twenty or so—"

"Twenty or so on twelve acres!" Ellery exclaimed aghast. Pretty nearly all the labour of his own hundred acres had been done of late by himself and his two sons.

"Twenty or so to begin with," Adnam repeated. "And I must have good men for a permanent staff. Will your Robert and Luke trust me and try it?"

"Ask them," said Ellery, on whom Adnam's confidence, and the enthusiasm bred of big figures, had begun to work the effect of faith. "Here's Bob now."

Standing in the doorway was a young man of about thirty, tall, dark, broad-shouldered; with deep-set, blue eyes that looked out from under black brows intently at everything they rested upon, as if everything were worthy of serious consideration. The features were clear cut, the clean-shaven jaw and chin strong, the finely formed mouth shut firm, the forehead broad for its height, the head well shaped and of average size—a man of strong character and few words, one to be trusted; that was what Robert Banks, standing there in the doorway in the dress of a labourer fresh from work in the fields, looked like, and that

is what Robert Banks was. There was something incongruous in his appearance, however. He did not look like a labourer, but like a man of another class dressed up as a labourer; it was the kind of incongruity which becomes strikingly apparent when a carriage horse is put to the plough.

He greeted Adnam from the doorway gravely but easily, drew a chair up to the table, sat down, and glanced at the plan. His father pushed it over to him, and, while he studied it, Adnam poured out the history of Intensive Culture on the Continent, with facts and figures enough to convince a man against his will; and Robert Banks was convinced, but not against his will. There were progressive qualities in him, and he had had education enough to develop both intelligence and enterprise. The question of wages was gone into on a profit-sharing basis, Adnam giving his views on the chances, but making it clear that that part of the business could not be settled until the experiment was well under way. But neither father nor son entertained a doubt of him in the matter of generosity and fair dealing. He was a Pratt, and that was enough.

When the interview ended, Robert Banks had undertaken to write to Luke that night, and was engaged to go to work in the Orchard next morning for a twelve hours' day at four shillings.

"I believe in this," he said, tapping the plan. "It's the best prospect I have."

"It gives you no cottage," said Adnam.

"It gives me the hope of one, here on the land where I was born, and where I'll stay and die if I'm not driven off it as many another man has been. I'll put off my marriage on the chance, and I'll stay and board with my father, if he'll have me——"

"You're kindly welcome to stay, Bob," Ellery put in.

"And I'll stand or fall with you, Mr. Adnam."

The "Mr." was a new measure of respect marking their altered relations. Hitherto they had been on an equal footing; they were now employer and employed.

Before Adnam went, Ella came back with some books in her hand: "Adnam, do give me a minute," she said.

"Have you been out, my girl?" her father asked sharply.

"I have," she replied.

"You'd better," he rejoined. "Sitting all day's no life for a

maid, and I'll not allow it. You've got to have air and exercise."

"No need to order me," she said. "When I know what's good for me, I do it. If I lost my health I should only be half alive; and while I live I want to be quite alive, body and brain. Adnam, will you help me with this German?"

"Can't you let your head alone?" Ellery grumbled.

"No. My brains are hungry. I must feed them. Adnam——"

Adnam took the book from her, and they sat down in the window to catch the light which was failing in the low room. He had been in the habit of helping her with her German and French, and she compelled him now, although he wanted to go.

Robert left the room. Ellery sat where he was, beside the centre table, smoking; and watched them, meditatively.

CHAPTER VI

SOME evenings later, Adnam, coming in for supper, found his father, mother, and brother already at table. He had brought in his big leather gauntlet gloves to be mended, and Seraph, seeing them in his hand, hunched up his shoulders, and gave vent to a little tee-hee sort of laugh.

"The British workman in gloves!" he exclaimed.

"The British workman if you like," Adnam answered cheerfully; "but the British workman of the future, I hope." He was not going to limit the number of his interests. Work is good, but incessant, monotonous toil, varied only by intervals of eating, drinking, and sleeping, is the devil. He meant to get more than that into his life.

"You'll be the man with music in his soul, I suppose," Seraph sniggered. He despised talent in a man, and despised Adnam for keeping his fingers flexible for the violin.

"Yes, music," said Adnam. "What I have I keep—my fingers for the violin."

He looked at his hand deliberately as he spoke. It was a finely formed, nervous, well-kept hand, but the hand of a man, and of a man of action. The filbert nails might indicate ideal-

ism, but there was no weak tapering of the fingers to betray a tendency to make plans which would never be carried out. The man with Adnam's hand would dream, but he would also do and dare. Imagination with him would be turned to practical account. He might let it run riot at times, but only on possible things, and constructively, with a view to making things possible. He might for a moment imagine himself at the summit of success, but he would not stop there, idly enjoying the fancy. He would wake up, set to work, and arrive in good time, if the thing could be done.

His mother also glanced at his hand and smiled: "Never let your music go, Adnam," she said. "Music is the most exquisite, the most enduring of all delights; the only one that never palls, never grows stale, never diminishes. If it be a joy in youth, it will be the last source of ecstasy in age."

"I should have thought conversation might have a look in for wearing well as a pleasure," Seraph remarked.

"Ah—conversation," she said. "Conversation is good—when it is good——"

"The same might be said of music, I should think," Seraph interrupted.

"Yes," she agreed. "But you can stop bad music, and no harm is done; but bad talk corrupts. Wrong notes are forgotten as soon as sounded, and make no mark on the mind; but in wrong words, in wrong ideas are the germs of mental disease. Bad music may irritate you while it lasts, but it does not contract your heart and corrode your soul as the best conversation—best in the sense of cleverest and wittiest—may do. No, music is the greater good; the only pleasure in life that is quite unalloyed."

Old Emery had listened to his lady with his hand upraised as usual, claiming attention to her gently uttered words. When she had finished, he nodded approval, then took up life again where it had been for a moment suspended, as we do after family prayers.

"So it's gardening you're after?" he said to Adnam, jocularly. "You'll sell your produce to the house, I suppose? Well, I'll take it all! I'll take it all!"

"That's said before witnesses," Seraph warned him.

"Well, sir, and why not?" the old man roared, intolerant

even of a jest at the integrity of the Pratts. "Do you think I'd go back on my word if I found I'd made a bad bargain? Do you think I'd do well to—is that what you're driving at? You're no Pratt!"

Seraph ducked his head, as from a blow.

While this rally was in progress Adnam had gone on with his supper stolidly, as if what was being said neither concerned nor interested him; but his mother had listened, and now glanced at him expectantly, with her confident shadow of a smile.

Adnam, meditating, carefully buttered a piece of toast.

"Fair dealing," he said at last, in his slow dispassionate way, as if weighing the worth of the practice against other methods. "I am for fair dealing. It would not be fair dealing to take you at your word, father. When my produce is fit for the market, you shall have first choice. I shall sell no pigs in a poke."

The old man glanced at his wife, and into his face there came the suppressed satisfaction of a partner at cards, who has looked at his hand, and found it good. Seraph affected to smile, but his crafty countenance expressed discomfiture.

"The flag's up at the Castle," he said, by way of giving a turn to the conversation.

"Ay, so I see," his father answered. "The family must be back. When did they come?" The question was addressed to his wife.

"I don't know," she answered. "In her last letter the duchess told me to expect her one day this week."

"Melton's not been away at all, I believe," Seraph said. "He's been lying low at the Castle; but I've seen him about."

"Ninian—" Mrs. Pratt began in a tone of surprise. "Surely you are mistaken. What could he be doing here alone?"

"After some girl, I should think," Seraph answered, casually.

Mrs. Pratt's sensitive face flushed. She looked at her husband as if for protection. The old man knitted his brows.

"You know what I think of that sort of talk," he said, in a low concentrated tone. "It makes me sick at heart to have

to speak, but you leave me no choice. I won't have this atmosphere polluted with evil thoughts."

"Oh, come now, father," Seraph remonstrated temperately. "I meant no harm. A joke's a joke even when it's a bad one."

"Evil speaking, lying and slandering are no joke," his father said, severely.

"I agree," said Seraph. "But the mention of a simple fact does not bring what I said into that category. I am sorry if I have shocked your delicacy"—he looked at his stepmother—"I apologise."

There was no real apology behind the words. He was thinking what fools these good women are to shut their eyes to what is going on for fear of sullyng themselves with the knowledge; by so doing they make it easy for the knaves to work their will. Seraph was not wanting in shrewdness.

Mrs. Pratt accepted his apology with a nervous little smile. "Ninian and Eustace are just like my own boys," she said, apologetic in return. "They were with me before I knew you and Adnam. And it hurts me to hear wrong-doing imputed to them—hurts me as it would to hear it of you or Adnam."

"But, mother dear," Adnam remonstrated, "a lord may love a lady without having it imputed to him for evil, surely?"

"I did not understand Seraph to mean a lady," Mrs. Pratt faltered, in dread of finding herself guilty of injustice.

"Well, please understand it now," Seraph said, quick to follow Adnam's lead into the ways of peace.

"That settles it right," said old Emery, with a satisfied nod, as at an account in dispute, which has been found after all to balance correctly.

After supper he settled himself in the big old red leather-covered armchair by the hearth. There was a table beside him, on which was a shaded lamp, the day-old newspaper, and a book; but the hearty supper he had eaten did not incline him to read. He sat with folded hands, a restful look of content on his fine old face, and gazed at the smouldering logs, which every now and then leaped into flame, or, falling together sent showers of sparks up the wide chimney. The pewter plates and flagons on the high mantelshef glinted in the flickering firelight. The old lamp-lit hall glowed with warm colour; and there was a stillness; but not the stillness which invites to repose; the stillness rather which rouses expectancy, as of something want-

ing and yet to come. When the old man asked for music, and Adnam and his mother began to play, the void was filled.

Seraph waited for the music to begin, then tip-toed out of the hall in his furtive way, as if he feared to be caught and called back. His father, through half-closed eyelids, saw him go, and compressed his lips. He constantly watched his eldest son, but involuntarily, and with that increase of irritation which comes of a recognised sense of being irritated by something which should not have that effect. Seraph gone, he gave himself up to the music. Violin and piano, blending, added harmony of sound to the harmony of colour with which the dark old lamp-lit hall was aglow, and perfected the picture to the satisfaction of sense and soul. On the face of the slender graceful lady at the piano, and of the slender graceful lad standing beside her, as they played, there shone the rapt expression of the devotee. Art gives of its best only to those who pursue it for itself, with love and reverence; and it was with love and reverence that these two played. The music swelled—swelled to a climax; then softly sank—and gradually died away. The piano was gently closed, the violin returned to its case, the music books put away, order restored; then the mother flitted noiselessly from the dim-lit hall, noiselessly followed by her son; and old Emery was left, peacefully slumbering as was his wont at that hour, in the great armchair by the fire—taking a preliminary canter of a nap, before he started fairly, after a little reading, for a long night's sleep.

Adnam followed his mother upstairs to her sitting-room, where it was their habit to finish the evening alone together; a habit which had been formed in the days when Baby Adnam was bathed and fed by his mother, and crooned to sleep. The hour they spent together in that room before they went to bed was an hour sacred to themselves, upon which no one was allowed to intrude. Whatever there was of admirable in Adnam's character in after life owed itself to the influences of that hour.

Ursula Pratt, in her own sitting-room, found a setting suited to her old-world air. The room itself, with its two high, narrow windows, its dark oak panelling, its sparse furnishings of old carved cabinets and quaint, hard, high-backed chairs, might have been the convent parlour of an abbess in mediæval times, so solidly severe was its simplicity, so suggestive were all its

arrangements of the religious life; but not of the barren religious life of the selfish solitary, a life wasted in the effort to save her own soul by propitiating with self-torment the cruel malicious devil whom she has mistaken for God; rather the warm life of a community of which it is the centre, a community perpetually engaged in adoration of the beautiful, and in offering up the incense of good works, engendered by good feeling, to the God of Love. The warmth was in a certain sense of comfort quite compatible with the quaintness and the stiffness. There is a sense of comfort in some churches which is an aid to prayer, the comfort which comes of appropriateness; and so it was here in Ursula's parlour, which was at once the expression of her character, and the result. She had collected the various pieces of furniture it contained from other rooms to which they had been consigned by her predecessor as useless old lumber out of date, and had had them carefully renovated. Their age as well as their form appealed to her, their long association with the family of the man to whom she owed her happiness claimed her pious respect.

She seated herself now in her high-backed abbess chair by the fireside, rested her slender hands on the arms, and looked up at Adnam, who was standing with his back to the hearth looking down at her. In this attitude the likeness between them was emphasised, and the difference: he with his young face set with resolve, his young eyes looking out upon life; she with the same set face, but emaciated; the same eyes also looking out, but beyond—at that which was not as yet within range of his vision.

"So you have begun," she said.

"Yes, I have begun," he answered.

"And the difficulties have also begun," she pursued.

"There is only one difficulty," he averred confidently: "the money to make a start. My father has offered me some, but it is not nearly enough, and he is pinched himself."

"He has always been generous to me," she said. "He has always given me enough and to spare, and ever since you were born I have been saving up for you. For twenty-one years, Adnam, I have been looking forward to this moment. I have known that you must have money, as a mother-bird knows that her nestlings must have food; and I have been preparing for

the moment when it should come. I believe I can give you more than enough."

Adnam did not thank her, he did not seem to have heard what she said; his eyes were fixed with a slight frown of intentness on the wall at the opposite end of the room, where a dark oil painting of some religious subject, not visible in the dim lamplight from where he stood, was let into the paneling.

"What is it, Adnam?" his mother asked, with the faint flicker of a smile.

"Principally puzzlement," he answered, looking down at her affectionately. "I am wondering why you, to whom all worldliness is distasteful, are doing so much to further the worldly ambitions of your sordid son."

"Ah, sordid!" she exclaimed, rejecting the word with a gesture. "You are not that; you never will be. But you must have your training. All worldliness will become distasteful to you, too, in time—when you know the world, that is to say. Those who are brought up in the cloister hanker after the world which they have never known, and are disturbed in mind; but those who pass through the world to the cloister find peace. They know. They have proved the vanity, the illusion. They have learnt that happiness is a condition in ourselves, the outcome to devotion to something better than ourselves. It is no use to tell you this, no use to ask you to believe; it is better that you should know. If you do not prove it true for yourself by experience you will always be tormented by doubt. But, Adnam, there is one promise which I must exact from you before I set you free to follow your own bent. I have taught you to pray. Promise me that, whatever happens, you will pray, always, every day; and pray with the more determination when you find that you have lost your faith in prayer—as you probably will find for a time, sooner or later."

"I promise, mother," Adnam said solemnly, and for a moment there was a light in his eyes like the light in her own.

She rose and kissed him. "Now, good-night," she said. "And remember this; bear it in mind for my sake, always:

*"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of."*

CHAPTER VII

THE landlord of the Brabant Arms, Adam Hurst by name, standing at the door of his inn in the early morning sunshine the day after the return of The Family, looked out on the village green, saluted various of his customers with a cheery good-morning as they passed on their way to work, and further observed that the flag was up at the Castle. And, "It is so," one would reply; and another would say, "Ay, The Family's back"; and all would trudge on enlivened by this exchange of pleasant news. It was the news of the day, known to them all, but no one spoilt the telling of it by saying so. When two met, there was a tacit understanding that the one who got in the first word on the subject should enjoy the importance of having made the announcement. Since feudal times the return of The Family to the Castle had been an important event to the villagers of Castlefield Saye. Not that it now affected them materially; the difference it made was purely sentimental. It gave them a thorough change, an emotional change, which, when pleasurable, is curative; the best change for the better to be had. Centuries ago, doubtless, the hoisting of the flag at the Castle meant much to the villagers, of good or evil, justice or injustice, according to the mood of the lord in possession; but the bucolic memory is not resentful, and all that was left of the feeling of bygone times was this hereditary gladness. It roused his people to know that the duke was there again. When they looked up to the Castle and saw the flag flying, it was as if they looked up to the duke. The Castle stood for him as a snail's shell stands for a snail; only the shell is seen, the rest is imagined. But they knew the duke as they knew a snail; and what they knew, taken with what they imagined, gave their minds a stimulant, favourable to conversation. The spirit of old times in some of its lovelier particulars lingers still ten miles from a railway station. Love and loyalty, for instance, and the habit of looking up with full faith in what is above as being worthy of reverence; so the rustic mind mounted to the Castle first, and thence it sprang to heaven. Could the labourer have expressed himself, it would

have been found that his feeling for the Deity was very much the same as his feeling for the duke. He was hereditarily attached to them both, and served them in the same spirit, a spirit of thankfulness when things went well, and a grumbling spirit at other times; in the first instance he would praise the duke and the Deity indiscriminately; but in the second, when he grumbled, it was at his own lot, as at a thing inevitable, for which none of the powers could be justly called to account. This attitude was beneficent in its immediate effect, since it resulted in the content which comes of resignation; but, beyond the moment, the effect was dire, in that it made for the acceptance of things as they were, and discouraged speculation with regard to things as they might be, as a hopeless waste of time. Round and about Castlefield Saye there was no provision of change for the better as yet; such change as the agriculturist foresaw he dreaded; to make the best of life as he found it was his constant endeavour. He was steeped in the old conservative misapprehension which results in the effort to make static that which by the laws of the universe exists healthily only while it flows. The ocean was ever before him with its storms and its calms, and in the rising and falling of the tide he found for himself an image of life. The image was false and misled him, in that he saw himself stationary like the ocean instead of as a barque upon it, steerable into any port.

There were three principal landowners in the neighbourhood of Castlefield Saye. First, Squire Appleton Pointz in the number of his acres; then the duke with a fine property also; and thirdly, Yeoman Pratt with his freehold of fourteen hundred acres, enclosed on three sides by the two larger properties, but open to the sea. In some places the position of Pratt's rich land might have made of his neat little estate a Naboth's vineyard to be envied by his great neighbours, but here there was no feeling of that kind; custom forbade, also conservatism; for Brabants and Pointzes and Pratts had held their respective acres now in neighbourly nearness for too many generations, and lived in peaceful neighbourly respect for each other's relative social positions too long to be easily persuaded that any change was desirable. Progress had not been the policy of the county, but

peace was its practice. Landlords had the reputation of being pleasant-mannered men when you came in contact with them, and a grudge against any one of them was very rare. If pledges were not always fulfilled, or grievances remedied, it was so generally made out to be the agent's fault, that agent and scapegoat might have been interchangeable terms. Conservatism is the canker of society, but it has its conveniences for the individual, especially the great convenience of making it a point of decency to keep the ugly sores that result carefully covered up; thus preventing that strain upon the feelings which tends to incite to rash attempts to trace effects to their causes, and to discover by experiment radical cures for the old complaints. It was not necessary to have a benevolent countenance and cultivate long white locks to play Mr. Casby among the cottagers; pleasant manners were enough for the purpose. The things that went wrong were the kind of things that had always been going wrong; therefore they were accepted as part of the natural order of things. When the village boys grew up, and wanted to marry, and were driven into the towns because they could not get a roof in the country to cover them, they went without bitterness, leaving their hearts behind them on the land; while the farmers, in the same spirit, let good arable fields drop into indifferent pasturage because labourers were scarce, and set the scarcity down to the Radicals, their argument being that you could not preach new-fangled ideas without engendering a dangerous spirit of discontent; and what was all this talk about the right of man to a living wage, to house-room enough to bring up a healthy family, to good drainage and a water-tight roof but a new-fangled idea? The people were doing well enough before such talk began. It was just teaching them to be dissatisfied. At any rate, the farmers said, and truly, they did not get profit enough out of the land to pay such wages as would make it possible for the labourers to live luxuriously. It had been suggested that there was enough to be made for the purpose by modern methods of cultivation, but this was met with the pious assertion that what had been good enough for their fathers in the way of agricultural knowledge was good enough for them; which attitude of mind is a *cul-de-sac* from which you can only emerge by going back. Individualists they were on that countryside to a

man, from the duke to the village idiot, doing the best that they could for themselves, and little or nothing for each other, except in an exciting emergency when ricks were on fire or floods out, and then they knew that the hand they lent was certain to be returned to them on like occasions. The one germ of co-operation amongst them appeared in the purchase and use of machines, but these they had turned against the labourer, as the labourer had foreseen that they would. For the machines had not been used to increase profits but to lessen expenses, superfluous hands being turned adrift instead of kept on to do work which the machines could not do, paying work, which had had to be neglected for want of hands in the days before machinery was invented.

The sun shone on Adam Hurst, and Adam Hurst may be said to have shone on the village green that morning, so beaming was his countenance, as he looked about him, up and down on his side of the road where the "bettermer" people lived, and opposite at the cottages of the labourers. His view of these was somewhat interrupted by a patriarchal chestnut-tree, a giant survival from the days when none but tree-people lived in those parts. This tree was as the banyan of the Indian village in summer when the elders held their councils of an evening after work. At other times the children claimed its shade, and practised for their own old age, when it should come upon them, by mimicking the customs of the elders. The great bole of the tree was encircled by seats, gifts of the duchess. There were no backs to the seats. Two estimates had been submitted to her grace, one with backs, the other without. The duchess chose the one without on account of the cost, for, as she said, it was her duty to be careful with money, nowadays, when so much was required; and of course backs were not necessary for "people of that kind," they had such wonderful backs of their own. You could see that when they were at work in the fields. It would break our backs to stoop in that way, but happily they were different, and we know that the back is suited to the burden (the duchess was genuinely pious), or is it the burden to the back? At any rate, it was very wonderful, and how inscrutable are the ways of Providence! It made her think of "Millet and the *Angelus*, you know—and all that sort of thing—so very beautiful!"

The duchess herself was by nature kinder than Providence, or she would have been, that is to say, if Providence knew more than the duchess. For could she have been made to realise how those backs did ache while they were acquiring their permanent bend—a slow process, begun soon after cradle-time and patiently endured through the long toilsome days which piled up the years with double their normal weight and brought on old age prematurely—had the good duchess but realised this she would have done without something herself to make those seats restful. She was likely even to have had them padded, and covered with some sort of waterproof thing made to look like chintz—whatever the expense—which would not only have stood the weather but would have been bright and cheery and enlivening for the poor dear people. That was the little duchess—known familiarly to her intimates, among themselves, as Good Gracious.

Adam Hurst's nephew on his sister's side, Leonard Pettiblock, joined his uncle at the door. Properly speaking he was cleaning out the tap-room, but it's a poor heart that never rejoices, and a few minutes' ease in the sunshine would not be missed from the working day, especially if you kept your mind on your work by bringing out the dustpan in your hand, an implement which did well for a reminder by acting as an item of inconvenience whatever pose you assumed, being unpleasant to lean against if you put it behind your back, and unpractical if you inadvertently used the frayed-out corner to scratch your head. The usual order of domestic discipline was reversed between this uncle and nephew, as was shown by a subtle change in the uncle's manner when the nephew appeared. The beaming good-nature of his countenance remained, but it had become the product of art. The cheeriness of his manner was courageously maintained, but with the courage of the caught, deprecating blame. There was conciliation in the rustic tone he assumed. His nephew was rough and rustic, but Adam had been polished by years of service in gentlemen's houses. Either manner was natural to him, for he had been a village lad himself, and he found it convenient in his present position to have two manners, one for the gentry, the other for his rustic customers when it suited his business to make them feel at home with him.

"That you, Len?" he said. "It's a fine day."

Pettiblock ignored this obvious statement.

"A day like this," Adam Hurst proceeded valiantly, "allus makes me think of your pore a'nt." He paused to let the allusion sink into his nephew's heart; then, by way of adding pathos to the tender recollection, concluded: "My pore dear wife. Eh! Len, my boy, you don't know what it is to lose a good wife! You may remember her as an a'nt, but an a'nt's not a wife, however much she may do her duty by you. And do her duty by you she did—with a clout when you deserved it; and goodies, too, likewise, in due season."

He tasted a scriptural flavour in this last phrase, and delivered it unctuously. Leonard spat out into the gutter as if he did not like the flavour, but made no other sign.

"A woman about the house," his uncle recommenced; "well, it's a woman about the house. There's no denying it, and there's nothing like it. Her value is far above rubies. Up early. To bed late. All over the place. If you don't see 'er, you 'ear 'er. Many's a time, on just such a day, I've stood 'ere on this very spot, and 'eard yer a'nt, my pore dear wife, at it——"

"At wot?" Leonard interrupted, looking at his uncle for the first time.

"Eh?" Adam was not prepared to expand the statement. He scratched his head to gain time. Time sent him off on another tack. "Why, Len," he said plaintively, "you're looking at me like the Day of Judgment, lad. You're not yourself this mornin', surely."

"Who am I then?" Leonard asked grimly.

Hurst tried to evade the question: "And me talkin' to yer pleasant about yer a'nt. My pore dear wife was a woman in a thousand."

"If she'd a bin in a million, she'd still 'a' bin a woman, I should think," Pettiblock put in grimly.

"True fur you, Len," said his uncle, taking this for a concession, and gaining confidence.

"She were a woman," Leonard pursued, "an' she were treated like a woman."

"I hope so," his uncle said, as if merit were being attributed to him, which should be acknowledged, though with becoming modesty. "I hope so."

"She were treated like a woman," Pettiblock repeated, and

spat out again into the gutter as if to get rid of such treatment. "She were put upon, she were run off of 'er feet, she were up early and to bed late, an' the more she did the more she might do, an' no thanks for it. That's the way yer treat a woman, the most on yer."

"It's all true what you say, Len," Hurst answered mildly; "or almost all. But she weren't put upon. What she did she did of 'er own free will and accord. I never give 'er an order not once in 'er life. But thanks I did give 'er, an' thanks I give 'er still. Encouragement, I always say, is the right whip for a woman."

"That's a bull's eye, uncle!" the nephew allowed sardonically. "She did the work an' you did the encouragement, an' that's about all you ever did do. An' it's about all you ever do do, standin' out 'ere, w'en you should come in an' do your share. I ain't my a'nt. Bein' encouraged don't kind o' encourage me. It riles me, that's wot it does."

He threw down the dustpan, put his hands deep in his pockets, stood up to his uncle, and looked him in the face truculently. Adam picked up the dustpan politely, and was for giving it back to him, but when a man keeps his hands in his pockets, it is obviously a mistake to offer him a dustpan, so Adam kept it himself, and used it as a fan, intermittently.

"Are yer comin' to 'elp me clean up?" Pettiblock demanded; "or would yer like better I should come and 'elp yer to do nothin' out 'ere all day?"

"I'm comin'," said Adam feebly, and then looked up and down the road in the hope of a reprieve. The village policeman appeared at that moment, and Adam's countenance cleared. "There's John Body," he said. "I must give 'im good day. When you bin in business as long as I 'ev, you'll know wot it's worth to be civil."

The policeman was abreast of them before Pettiblock could reply. He was a well-fed fellow, with coat much shortened in front by the bulge across which it was strained.

Hurst had on the best manner of his trade in a moment. "That you, Mr. Body?" he said. "Wonderful weather for the time of year! As I was a-saying just now"—he had been going to add to "my nephew," but with that gentleman present and in no mood to connive at inexact statements, even when

merely decorative additions to assist the flow of a sentence, he wisely hesitated, then recommenced: "They brought it with them up at the Castle."

"They brought the mischief wi' 'em too," said the policeman chuckling, as if the mischief were a pleasant addition to the society of the neighbourhood. "Wot d'ye think 'appened to me last night at dusk? W'y, I took up Lord Eustace fur furious driving! I seed a dog-cart come rattlin' down Prentice Lane right into some cows bein' drove in, an' the wheel catches one of 'em an' over she goes, an' I 'ollers out 'Stop!' to my gentleman. 'I takes you in charge.' 'Oh, do you,' says my gentleman, as bold as brass. 'Yer goin' to take me in charge, are yer, Body?' And there was Lord Eustace himself as pleasant as pleasant. An' I ses, 'Beg pardon, my lord,' an' we laughed together 'earty. 'E's a good chap, is Lord Eustace."

"He reminds me of his father at the same age," Hurst said in agreement. There was a reminiscent smack in his tone which Body encouraged.

"You was lads together," he suggested.

"We was the same age, the duke and me, when he were Lord Melton. And many's the time——" Hurst broke off. It was well known that he could have told tales of the days when he and the duke were the same age, and traps were often set to lure him on, but he was a model of discretion. He seldom said more than enough to excite curiosity.

"How about the cow?" Pettiblock asked.

"The cow?—oh, she dropped 'er calf last night, I've jest 'eard," Body answered indifferently.

"His lordship'll pay up, of course!" said Pettiblock ironically.

"Oh, ye can't be 'ard on Lord Eustace——"

"Course not! It's the owner of the cow who's the poor man, I reckon—pah!" Pettiblock got rid of his disgust in the way he usually affected, and went into the house.

The policeman expressed tolerance of that which was deplorable by drawing down the corners of his mouth and shrugging his shoulders. Adam Hurst answered the gesture with deprecating nods: "Yes," he said, "that's 'im now, every time. No respect fur the Lord's will wot said to them as have shall be given."

"He'll find that'll not pay," was John Body's opinion, and an epitome also of his working principles. Having spoken, he walked on, carrying his frontal protuberance arrogantly.

The man of action called to his uncle from within to hurry up. The contemplative uncle ventured on one more lingering look about him, which he intended to be the last, but just as he was turning to go, he descried a remarkable figure in the distance approaching, and felt it right to wait till he saw who it was. The figure was remarkable for the colour of its clothing, a gay brown figure, with splashes of white and green. It proved to be the duke himself, having a look round. White spats and shirt accounted for the splashes of white; a green soft felt hat and new silk scarf were the other touch of colour.

Mrs. Blatchford, the rector's wife, was the first to know that the duke was out. She saw him pass the Rectory gate.

"There's the duke!" she exclaimed, greatly exhilarated, as if the sight of him had done her good, as indeed it had. As with the peasants, her reverence for him was the stepping-stone to her reverence for her Maker, only the greater comfort came of being able to look up to the duke. Yet he was less to her than to them, for to her he was merely a duke; but to the simple minds of the villagers he presented himself as something more than a duke. He was a human being. The feeling of clanship was strong on both sides. They were his people, and he was as much attached to them as they were to him. Now, as he passed, he had a friendly word for every one, and every one had a respectful smile for him. Not one of them would have troubled him with a grievance. Grievances they kept for Colonel Kedlock, the duke's agent, and if they were not remedied, they knew whom to blame.

The duke stopped at the Brabant Arms.

"Well, Adam," he said.

Adam rubbed his hands and beamed and bowed. He had seen the duke's body servant from the days when the duke was Lord Melton until a few years back when he married, and would still have passed in appearance for a gentleman's gentleman, grown ripe. Standing in his own pillared porch that morning he looked like a family butler when you catch him in his pantry with his coat off and his apron on, cleaning the plate. They had both worn side whiskers in their youth, and Adam wore

his still, but on the duke's cheek a short remnant high up near his ear alone remained like *débris* which should have been cleared away but had been accidentally left behind and forgotten. The duke and Adam were men of the same age, the same height and figure, the same popular type, the type which has all over it the brand of eminent respectability. The brand was natural to the duke, but in Adam it was a decoration acquired by close association with the duke while in his service. There were those who discovered a family likeness between them, which was not impossible, for the Brabant features were to be found among the peasantry, and for the same reason that the lineaments of Royal personages have reappeared time after time in certain families of the British aristocracy. The Brabants had always been conspicuous for their family pride. They considered their blood the best in the country, that of Royalty of necessity not excepted, Royalty having originally founded the family with some of its own, and up to the present generation they had pretty nearly all been for improving the race with it whenever they found a woman willing; as must have been evident to any nice observer moving about on the family estates and in the villages tenanted by the duke's people, where, among red-haired, fair-haired, brown-haired and neutral tinted families with plebeian features, the soft black hair, the patrician delicacy of skin, and the refined traits which distinguished the Brabants, continually reappeared in some mother's Benjamin boy or darling girl, conspicuously. But on this head, no suspicion attached to the present duke. The eminent respectability of his appearance acquitted him. The fact also that he himself "favoured" a family into which the Brabants had married stood his reputation in good stead, although the points peculiar to the pure Brabant stock had reappeared in his sons.

Conviction is carried by curious reasoning to the mind that would be convinced. A truism in the right place saves pages of explanation, and one of the most useful for the purpose is that which embodies the fact that it is impossible to do everything. No Brabant had ever attempted to do everything. As a family they had consistently devoted themselves to the one thing that they found themselves good for. It was in the department of the pleasures of life that their abilities shone. The

talent for making things pleasant was hereditary, and had been carefully developed by persistent cultivation. It was to a great ancestress that they owed this quality, she having raised the family to eminence and founded its fortunes by the ability with which she contributed to the pleasure in life of the reigning monarch of her day—as may be found recorded in any respectable history of our great and glorious rulers. The custom in every country is to abuse and starve the teachers, and to praise and pay the entertainers extravagantly; and the Brabants had always benefited largely by this natural tendency. The Brabants were generally sure to come in for any good thing that was going, without the labour of asking for it, and their proficiency in their own department was held to excuse their failings in other respects. The present duke had no need to ask forgiveness for his faults. If he had any they were overlooked because he spoke to you pleasantly, went to church regularly, did not drink, never said anything that could be quoted against him as a revolutionary sentiment dangerous to the established order of good and evil, and bred race-horses.

“Well, Adam,” the duke repeated, “how are you?”

“I hope I see your grace well,” said Adam, who knew his place better than to intrude with information regarding his own obscure body, even by request; “and The Family,” he added with a jerk.

“All well,” said the duke, “and glad to be back. Any news? Nephew quite recovered? Down with typhoid, wasn’t he, last autumn?”

“He was, your grace, but that’s bin cured. I only wish other things he’s took with were as easy got rid of. He’s not satisfactory, and that’s the truth.”

The duke raised his eyebrows interrogatively. Adam’s manner was portentous.

“He’s not satisfactory,” Adam repeated. “He does his work”—this was put in with the air of giving the man his due, but—“he does his work right enough, and I can’t say he drinks—” it sounded as if drinking would have been a mitigation of his peculiar offence—“nor he isn’t otherwise unsteady. But—” great gravity settled on the open countenance of Adam Hurst and was reflected sympathetically on the kindly intelligent face of the duke. “But it’s his ideas. I’m afraid, your

grace," Adam lowered his voice, "I'm afraid there's but one name for him, and that's a bad 'un"—his voice sank—"he's a Radical."

The murder was out. The duke compressed his lips, and shook his head up and down, evidently in full accord with the landlord in his horror.

"How did he get it?" he asked, as if it were a disease and catching. "I thought we had kept clear of all that sort of thing."

"So did us all," said Hurst. "But it's about. Young men isn't what they were. They don't take what you tell 'em now. It's them bicycles. They think nothin' of goin' to Closeminster and back of an afternoon. An' wot do they do w'en they get there? They reads the noospapers—and there you are!"

But the duke was not there. His attention had wandered, and so suddenly that the expression of his face became compound, his mouth remaining set in detestation of Radicalism after his eyes began to look alert with interest at a girl who was approaching.

"Who's that?" he asked, sharply.

Hurst turned to see: "It's Ella Banks, your grace," he said.

The question had been asked and answered in rapid undertones. After glancing at the girl, Adam looked up at the Castle intently. He seemed to see something of interest which had hitherto escaped him in the flag hanging limp about its staff in the still air.

The girl came on with a step so buoyant she seemed to float. The scanty black dress she wore concealed no beauty of her slender figure. Had the dress been diaphanous, Spring itself could have had no more lovely embodiment. When she came abreast of the duke, she dropped a graceful curtsy, and passed on, a princess in disguise, one would have said, escaping from captivity and glad to be free.

There was none of the pleased interest in the duke's face that an elderly man might naturally take in a pretty girl as she passed. He had looked at her as though examining her with serious interest, and when she had gone he stood for a little, reflecting.

"What is she doing here?" he asked at last, in the same undertone, as of one not wishing to be heard.

"In the village this morning, your grace? I don't know," Adam answered. "Some business, your grace may be sure. It's a goodish walk for her from Pointz, and she's not one to go gadding about just to pass the time. She's a rare one for work."

"She's living at Pointz then?" the duke asked.

"Yes, your grace, with her stepmother and—er—her father, Ellery Banks," Adam answered, stumbling curiously over the simple statement. "Has been since her grandmother died—a goodish time now."

"Does she—er—get on with her people?"

"There's no sayin', your grace. They're a close family, all of them, and as for her—she has a way with her, your grace, a high way, if I may say so. She says nothing, and nobody dare ask her nothing."

"Works hard, eh? What does she do?"

"She's took up the lace-making," Adam answered, "and they do say there's not been such another hand at it hereabouts these two hundred years, your grace."

The duke stood a moment longer with his eyes on the ground. Then he walked on, leaving Adam Hurst without another word or sign, as if he had forgotten his existence.

But Adam Hurst seemed neither surprised nor offended. His attitude was the attitude of one who understands.

On the hill side opposite, one square tower and a bit of the battlements of the Castle could be seen—just enough to make it appear as if the Castle were standing on tip-toe, like a curious person, peering down into the village over the tops of the trees. Adam looked up and shook his head at the Castle, as though in reproof of this indiscretion. Then immediately he turned and went into the house with the air of one to whom something that was to be expected had happened and was happily over.

The duke, deep in thought, walked on to the end of the village, crossed the road, and began to ascend the hill by a narrow path which led through the woods to the Castle. The hill was steep, and the duke had taken it courageously; but he soon realized that at fifty-eight he was not the man at a bold ascent that he had been twenty years before. He stopped to recover breath, took off his hat to cool his head, and stood looking down at the village, which lay spread out before him in full

view. In the pellucid air, bright with sunshine, the high gabled cottages, mostly thatched, standing in little gardens, set round the green; the green itself, with its patriarch tree, its well and horse-trough and parapet of old grey stone battered and worn by wind and weather and the friction of the generations which had drawn water from it; the Brabant Arms, a typical village inn, the centre of sociability, passed by everybody sooner or later in their walks abroad, as well-conducted as the Castle itself and as much a feature of the place—making, together with the drapery store, the butcher's shop, the smithy, and the fine old church with its square tower, its apse with pointed windows and its great west door, a representative scene, perfect in every detail which could be expected of it; but, as it looked that morning, more suggestive of the picturesque beauty of the stage than of the English character, which does not, as a rule, find a necessary expression of itself in the effort to mould its surroundings into lovely and harmonious shape. The completeness of Castlefield Saye had come about gradually, and rather by accident than design; but it was a model village, and the duke looked down upon it with pride and pleasure in the possession. All the same it made him think of a scene in a theatre. The stage was clear for the moment, but the chorus of villagers might be expected to dance in from the wings, or it might be the comic relief, or the young lovers themselves coming from opposite directions, and meeting, with greatly emphasised surprise and delight.

It has been said that every man looking on at a play is the hero, every woman the heroine. The duke with the young lovers in his mind began to whistle "I fondly love thee still," involuntarily, then stopped short, took heed of his sensations, and reflected. It was one of those moments which come as a shock to a decent-minded man of middle age and social responsibilities, a moment of retrospective emotion made poignant instead of pleasurable by the realization that such moments must for the future be strictly retrospective. But, after all, every age has its pleasures.

*"Old folks say there are no pains
Like ache of love in aged veins."*

The horrid rhyme shot through the duke's mind. He chose

to think it irrelevant, and banished it. He could not see himself playing the part of young lover again, and would not see himself playing that of old idiot. Besides, he had had his day, and a good day too, good to the full extent allowed him by the code of his caste, which he had always strictly respected. Tried by the open tribunal of Society, he was honourably acquitted of any actionable misdemeanour; and even the secret tribunal of his own conscience found little as a rule with which to reproach him. If, in moments of depression, the rule was broken by a pang of regret, it had hitherto been fugitive and easily traced to its source in some dietetic mistake or other breach of habit.

Adam Hurst again appeared at the door of the inn, and began to sun himself; but he had scarcely settled down to this congenial pursuit when Pettiblock came out after him. An altercation ensued, which resulted in the retreat of Hurst into the house, driven back to work, presumably, by his energetic nephew, who followed in his own good time.

"The comic relief," thought the duke.

The episode was no sooner over than a rider came in sight, walking his horse down the village street, and rocking easily to the long leisurely stride of the thoroughbred. The duke recognised his eldest son, Ninian to the family, Lord Melton to the outside world: "Good-looking fellow, Ninian," was the duke's mental comment. "What's he going to do with his life, I wonder?"

The question was a surprise to the duke himself the moment it was formulated, for it had never before occurred to him that there was anything special that Ninian could do with his life. The duke had never done anything particular with his own life but live it easily. No statesman had ever been produced by the family of Brabant, nor had it ever made history by other service to the country. It was even said that no duke of Castlefield Saye had ever been known by sight to the officials of the House of Lords, though that counted in no way against the estimation in which they were held, because the man of the moment was certain to be in his place to vote against any low Radical measure which might have for avowed object to raise the standard of comfort among the lower orders—the real object being, as everybody knew, the personal advancement of

outsiders, who found it paid to court popularity with specious promises; a most dangerous policy, productive of nothing but discontent and that tendency to uppishness among the common people which is so inconvenient to the gentry.

Lord Melton pulled up, waved his whip and called "Hi!" to some one not in sight from where the duke was standing. In a moment, however, Eustace, his second son, appeared and went up to his brother with a buoyant step and a smile. His eye-glass flashed, his white teeth gleamed in the sunshine. He caught hold of his brother's saddle, and walked on up the street beside him, the two talking and laughing gaily. There was a strong likeness between them, and both were more distinguished in appearance, with more of the Brabant in them showing than in their father. The duke himself, a man of middle height, with middle-aged figure now, and thin grey hair, had nothing specially distinctive about him, but the young men had.

"Good friends, those boys," the duke thought to himself, and the thought gave him pleasure.

He went on, making a bee-line through the thick wood to the Castle. The enjoyment with which he had set out on his morning walk had somehow lapsed, and he thought of trying something else. He even thought of the duchess—was there not something to be discussed? He had already paid his daily court to her, and could remember nothing which would make it his duty to go to her at that moment, and he was not at all sorry. They were excellent friends, but there certainly would have been difficulties between them if they had been plain Mr. and Mrs. Brabant living on some few hundreds a year in the close intimacy of a ten-roomed house; for Theodora Duchess could get on a man's nerves as successfully as any Emma of Suburbia. There were times when the duke, warned of her approach by the tap-tap of her high heels on the polished floor, fled from an interview incontinently. The duchess was satisfied that their marriage was in all respects a perfectly happy one; the duke would not have said so; but he would have courteously qualified the difference of opinion by supposing that it was as happy as marriages usually are, and taken credit to himself for going his own way and letting the duchess go hers, only requiring that each should have a plausible reason to account for their separate ways, such as affairs of state in his

own case and social duties in hers. Happily the duchess believed in the genuineness of both reasons.

Castlefield was not by any means their largest property, but it was the duchess's favourite residence. The duke proclaimed it his favourite residence also, which meant, not that he cared to live there much himself, but that he liked the duchess and the family to live there out of the way. In his absence the duchess commiserated her poor husband because he could not also be enjoying the dreamful ease of the south country sunshine and softness with the "few friends" who managed so pleasantly to vary the monotony for her, but then, of course, he had to be in London. Various other places also seemed to require his presence pretty often, such as Paris, Vienna, and even St. Petersburg, with intervals of rest and refreshment on the Riviera or in Egypt, and Homburg, of course, or some other Bad in due season for the benefit of his health.

Anything labelled duty is supposed to be disagreeable, and the more so the more credit we take to ourselves for the performance; which convenient superstition adds greatly to our satisfaction in many pleasant pursuits. It was said of the duke that he had a high sense of duty, and so he had, and not to himself first either. He thought most of his family, his property, his people, and there was also his duty to God, which he performed by going to church regularly, that being the whole of this part of his duty in so far as he understood it. It was done in the hope of a glorious resurrection, for the duke never did anything for nothing. But there is this to be said for him, that he never expected anybody to be more disinterested than himself, and he was quite as ready to pay when he felt indebted as to receive payments which were his due; a quality which would have worked out better for his debtors had he oftener felt indebted. He had his limitations of course. He was feudal as the remotest of his ancestors. He cared for his people as he cared for his family, giving them, not what they would have liked or had asked for, but what he thought was enough for them—enough in the case of his family, good enough in the case of his dependents. He had married as a duty to posterity, and also because he considered a duchess an indispensable part of his establishment. And he saw to it that she had all the privileges that redounded to the honour of his

house. As a duchess she had satisfied him; at least, he would not have exchanged her for any other duchess he knew. Though small, she was well set up, an excellent thing in a duchess; and she had kept her blond beauty well into middle age, and was not too plump. He believed that she could be as insolent on occasion as any of her caste, but in that he flattered her. Her insolence was accidental, the result of her inability to understand that "common people" and "people of that kind" had much the same sort of sensibilities as herself; that a common mother would be hurt, for instance, if her baby were called ugly even by a duchess with a smile. But to hurt with intention was not in her nature, which was of the kindest, as the duke well knew. In an obituary notice he could honestly have paid her every sort of conjugal compliment. Unfortunately, the qualities which gild such notices are not always the pleasantest to live with. An unaffectedly simple-minded, gentle, guileless lady may get on a man's nerves even at the best of times, and it was not the best of times with the duke that morning. It was one of the times when he made up his accounts with life and determined to see to things more himself. He had been making up his mind periodically for the last thirty years "to look into things," "to see to things more" himself, but had never got any further than the making up of his mind, because other things, such as successes with his horses on the turf, discovering a new way to pass the time pleasantly, or some special social distinction, invariably occurred to raise his spirits above that point of depression which results in immediate action when a reform of any kind is in question.

On arriving at the Castle, the duke shut himself up alone.

There are few who come near enough to remove the sense of loneliness when it is strong upon us, and any company but that of the few, or the one, at such times only aggravates the trouble. The duke was lonely. He was not given to introspection, and could not have told you what was the matter with him, but the symptoms are unmistakable. He shut himself up, kept his hat on, and lit a cigar. This room of his was not very large, nor especially well furnished, but it was comfortable; a man's room of the sort in which a man has evidently made himself at home. There was not much of anything in it, but what there was had been well-used. The books on their shelves

showed use in their bindings, the leather coverings of the chairs showed use, and the carpet showed use. On the writing-table there was litter enough to prove that it had been very recently in use, and the waste-paper basket was full.

The one thing in the room which was striking enough to distinguish it from the room of any other man of means was a superb Gainsborough hung in a conspicuous position, a portrait of the duke's grandmother, a beautiful woman, patrician in every feature, and of noble build, a woman fit to be the mother of a noble race. The duke stood before the portrait now, contemplating it as if it were new to him, or as if he had suddenly been struck by something in it which had never struck him before. There was not even a remote family resemblance between himself and this portrait. His father had married money without breeding, and his commonplace appearance had been inherited from his mother's family. He looked like something solid in the city, or a prosperous professional man, one of those with that straight sort of upper lip which, when it is compressed in the act of forming an accurate opinion upon the facts stated, looked equal to the task. His grandmother was pure Brabant in appearance and in fact, for it was a case of first cousins marrying, and the duke, her grandson, was proud of her.

But it was not pride that showed in his face as he earnestly looked into the portrait at that moment; if it were possible that such a thing could be inspired by a familiar and beautiful portrait of a beautiful woman, the strange look in his eyes might have been mistaken for fear. At all events, it was something serious.

"May I come in?" said some one at the door.

The duke started. He had been too absorbed to hear the tap-tap of his little lady's high heels, which usually warned him of her approach. He glanced at the door of an inner room, where he would have been safe, but it was too late. He had only time to snatch off his hat and put his cigar down as she entered.

"My dear, I am sorry to disturb you when you are busy," she began; "but there is a tiresome girl with some lace. I want to consult you ——"

CHAPTER VIII

THE Duchess of Castlefield Saye went through life handicapped by incurable amiability, but, as she was unaware of the defect, she took no blame to herself for the consequences, and was, therefore, never directly disturbed by them. Her incurable amiability was of the kind which has done so much to encourage and perpetuate the turpitude of a certain sort of man by making forgiveness easy to obtain whatever the offence. A hollow show of regret is enough to purchase such cheap forgiveness, which thus acts as a licence to sin seventy-and-seven times. This was her only great fault, but, like other great faults which we do not realize to be a fault in ourselves and therefore make no effort to correct, the unfortunate consequences of it were not confined to herself; for in her case an even more dangerous thing than not recognising it as a fault had happened, in that she mistook it for a virtue, and was doing her best to reproduce the defect by cultivation in her daughter, the already too confiding Lady Ann.

Lady Ann had left the schoolroom not because she was properly educated, but because she had arrived at the age when it is customary for young ladies of her rank to come out. Just as in certain households every contrivance for winter warmth must be stopped at a particular season whatever the weather, so had Lady Ann, not because she was ripe for the experience but because she was eighteen, been brought out into the great wicked world to which she belonged by birth. Her mother, however, had some glimmering idea that her equipment for the battle of life was not complete at every point, and she was doing her best to fill in the gaps in her education, although vague herself as to what constitute gaps in a girl's education. Mother and daughter were in the habit of spending an hour or so together every morning in the duchess's sitting-room for this purpose when at the Castle (there was no time elsewhere), and a very happy hour it was for both of them, gentle loving ladies that they were. They began by reading a portion of Scripture together, verse by verse, and the mother would expound, and the daughter would imbibe a general idea

that this exercise was making her good. If some of the passages which were expected to have this effect had answered the purpose, well would the exclamation have applied, "How wonderful are thy works, O God!" It is not, however, the sense of what we read, but the spirit in which we read it, that makes for the effect, so that a recipe for cooking conger eels would serve to keep us in the right way if regularly repeated with that intention, even if it were not a very good recipe; which observation is not irreverent if properly considered, that is to say, if it be taken as a warning to readers not to blame The Book for the shortcomings of their own understanding.

The duchess's bower, as the children called it, at Castlefield was, like the duchess herself, essentially early Victorian, and therefore, unlike the duchess, not particularly dainty; but it had for characteristics the charms of comfort and freshness, comfort in its restful chairs and sofas, its solid bookcases, its few good pictures and ornaments; and freshness in the light and air from three tall windows, in its spaciousness, its pretty chintzes, and in the flowers, of which there was no great number to cloy. The duchess was fond of flowers, and knew enough to have only one scented kind at a time in her room; violets, it might be, or wallflowers or roses. That bright March morning it was delicious with the perfume of freesias, the duchess's favourite scent. There are days when the spring in the south country is both winter and summer, and the winter of it that day was being respected by a fragrant wood fire on the hearth, while the summer in its brightness was being wooed to enter through an open window.

Mother and daughter had just closed their Bibles, and were sitting with them still on their laps; but the talk had wandered from the lesson to some little trouble in the household.

"I shall just leave it to your dear father," the duchess was saying. "He knows best about everything. I always think God was so good to us poor weak women when He made man the head of the woman. You cannot think what a rest it is, once you are married, to have your husband to rely upon; to be sure that, in every emergency, he will always know what is best to be done."

"But do all husbands invariably know? Suppose he made a mistake?" Lady Ann asked, the germ of sense in her searching for nourishment to strengthen its growth.

"Of course you must pray," said the duchess, "pray without ceasing. But it is not likely that an educated man would make a mistake. And you will marry an educated man, dearest, so you need have no fear."

"But," Lady Ann persisted, flushing at her own temerity, "but suppose, for the sake of supposing, that he made a mistake, or wanted me to do something wrong—or something——"

"Dear child, a gentleman would never want you to do anything wrong."

Lady Ann did not ask for the definition of a gentleman to be applied in any doubtful case. She thought she knew the genus off by heart.

"The man is the head of the woman," her mother repeated. "St. Paul said so, and St. Paul was—er—was a saint, you know. The woman's part is to obey. Love, honour, and obey. It is very beautiful to see how all things are ordered for the best. Women are weak and have to be protected. The girl has her father, the wife her husband, to look up to; and all good women have the chivalrous and respectful care of—of all really nice men." The duchess waived the other sort away with her hand as a negligible quantity, not worth considering because they did not belong to her set, and therefore could never come near enough to have authority over her or hers. So she talked, teaching her daughter as she had been taught, how not to see, to reason, to judge for herself. And the doctrine that a woman has only to be good and obey, and keep herself from all knowledge of evil that it may not grieve her, or, should the knowledge unfortunately come by chance, that she should ignore it, was accepted with reverence by Lady Ann because she had it from the mother she adored.

Her mother, watching her as she sat there with eyes full of dreamful ease, thought what a beautiful little head she had. The Brabant head had come to be noticeably small, natural selection having acted without question on the conventional fallacy that a small head is a thing to be desired. "The beautiful little head" of fiction is responsible for a tendency to breed small skulls in which there is no room for a useful supply of brains. "A fine well balanced brain" might, of course, be opposed to it, but seldom is, because fine, well balanced brains sound like work somehow, and work reeks of commercialism. The Brabants had certainly not much use for commercial brains

since none of them ever worked. They looked upon money as a thing to be made rather than earned, and they made a good deal sometimes by betting, gambling, and horse-racing, and by speculation under the expert advice of plebeian financiers who received *quid pro quo* the social countenance of the family. At these things, as they themselves would have elegantly expressed it, they were as sharp as monkeys, but sharpness does not require sustained effort of thought; besides, thought is not necessary when the game is a game of chance, so Nature, with her usual judicious economy, had ceased to supply the neglected machinery.

During the little pause which followed the duchess's final homily, a manservant came in and asked if her grace would be pleased to see Miss Ella Banks, who had brought some lace which she wished to have the honour of submitting to her grace's inspection. Her grace did please.

"Miss Ella Banks. Oh, these people!" the duchess exclaimed with an amused smile when the man had gone.

Ella Banks was shown in. She curtsied to both ladies with composure, then waited for the duchess to speak. The curtsy might have been an act of deference from an equal to an equal, so easy was it and so graceful.

"Where did you learn to curtsy, child?" the duchess exclaimed, but went on inconsequently without waiting for an answer: "You have brought some lace to show me?"

The little lady had jumped up, smiling and all aflutter to see the lace.

"With your grace's permission," Ella answered quietly. She undid a parcel she was carrying, and displayed the large lovely diaphanous piece upon which Adnam had seen her at work.

The duchess's little hands went out and her whole little person began to flicker as a bird flickers before it takes flight. "How exquisite!" she exclaimed. "Do, *do* look, Ann dearest, have you ever seen anything so perfect?"

"It is perfect!" Ann responded in italics.

"How human eyes could ever have seen to do anything so delicate is a wonder to me," the duchess cried. "You wish to sell it, I suppose?"

"I do, your grace," Ella answered. "I hoped your grace might like it."

"Like it? Oh, that is not the word!" said the duchess heartily.

She flitted across the room as she spoke (stumped rather, her step pulled up short by the height of her heels), hands and ribbons and laces all flickering in the animation of her desire to secure the treasure: "Where are my keys?" she cried, feeling about her dress and looking all over the room at the same time, helpless in her impatience.

Lady Ann rose to the rescue, and the keys were finally found in the lock of the drawer in the *escritoire* which the duchess wanted to open. She took out a cash-box, and looked into it with the complacent look of one who is about to do a good deed. The box was full of notes and gold. The duchess rummaged amongst the notes, chose one, and held it out to Ella with a beaming smile. Ella could see that it was a ten-pound note. She did not take it. After glancing at it she looked at the duchess and waited. The duchess persisted in offering the note: "It is for your beautiful lace," she said.

"There is the work of two years, sitting at it from daylight till dusk every day but Sunday, in that lace, your grace," Ella replied.

"I am sure there is," the duchess answered, beaming. "And how right and nice of you not to work on Sunday."

"I think she means that ten pounds is not enough for the lace, mamma dear," Lady Ann put in diffidently.

"Oh!" the duchess exclaimed, and the hand that held the note dropped to her side. "But, Ella Banks," she remonstrated, "ten pounds all at once is a large sum for a girl in your position to own."

"This lace is my only means of livelihood, your grace," Ella answered, speaking always with the quiet self-possession of a strong nature and with becoming respect.

"Oh, but surely you live with your father in that lovely little farmhouse which always looks so sweet," the duchess again remonstrated. "I often drive past it to show it to my friends, when the roses are out and the clematis. And they say, when they see you sitting in the window making lace, that you give the necessary touch of life which just completes the picture."

"My father has many expenses, your grace. He works hard. He cleared just six pounds last year——"

"Very creditable," the duchess interposed.

"But unfortunately not enough to work a farm and feed a family on. Now he is in debt."

"Dear me," said the duchess. "But how can your father be so badly off? Why, it was only the other day he had improved his farm so much that Mr. Clutterbuck was obliged to raise the rent. Mrs. Pointz told me."

"I don't know about obliged," said Ella. "Mr. Clutterbuck did raise the rent when the lease was renewed, and the little profit my father hoped to reap to repay him for all his toil is swallowed up by the extra expense."

"That's always the way," said the duchess. "It's just the same with us. His grace says so every day. There's nothing but expense. But, oh, dear me, in debt!" she broke off to exclaim with disapproval. "You know people in your position are really so improvident. Everybody says so."

Ella stood her ground with her steady eyes on the duchess, but a slight contraction of her features and a wild rose flush on her delicate cheeks betrayed some emotion. The kindly lady perceived it, and fearing that she had hurt the girl's feelings, she made a higher bid for the lace by way of applying balm to the wound.

"I will give you fifteen pounds," she said. "Surely that is enough?"

Ella let go the smile which she had been struggling to repress: "I am sorry, your grace," she answered, "but I cannot feed and clothe myself on seven-pound-ten a year. Besides, I could make double as much in two years with a sewing-machine. There has been no lace-making like mine in these parts for a hundred years. What was left of the art had hopelessly degenerated, and this kind that I do was thought to be extinct, but I have recovered it with much toil through Mrs. Pratt's kindness. She lent me some pieces of lace that had been carefully preserved by the Pratts for many generations, and I worked out this design from them. It took me months to discover how it was done."

"Dear me," said the duchess to her daughter in an agrieved tone, "I did not know that Ursula Pratt had any lace.

She never showed it to me. Why will people be so secretive?"

"This lace is fit for a queen to wear, your grace," Ella went on, speaking evenly still, but with anger in her heart because of the self-abasement to which she was driven by hard necessity. "There can be no finer in your grace's own collection, which is valued at a large sum, I understand."

"Oh, but my lace is old!" the duchess protested.

"I am sorry I cannot wait until mine is old for the full value of it, your grace," Ella replied with unruffled composure.

The duchess looked helplessly at Lady Ann. At that moment the door opened, and Melton lounged in. He was still in riding dress, and had his whip in his hand. The dress accentuated the greyhound characteristics of his physique, but he was a good-looking young man of the type. He was perceptibly taken aback when he saw Ella there, and betrayed some perturbation in his speech.

"Morning, mother. Morning, Ann. What's this? Lace?" He took up the gossamer web and examined it. "My godfather!" he exclaimed. "Did human hands make this! Have human eyes survived it! Why, it would do for a bridal robe for the queen of the fairies! Did you make it?"

He transferred his admiring glance to Ella's face, on which the delicate wild rose tint had again appeared, and his own dark face flushed to the forehead. Ella answered his question with a momentary smile.

His mother drew him aside. "I have offered the young woman fifteen pounds for it, and she seems to think that it is not enough," she complained, hands, ribbons, laces all flickering. "Surely fifteen pounds is a large sum for a girl in her position to have all at once?"

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "You'd have offered five hundred for it if it had had a history, mamma dear."

"But Colonel Kedlock says we mustn't over-pay these people. It makes them——" the dear lady tried hard to think what it made them, but had to give it up, and ended lamely by asking what she should do.

"Pay the girl her price," Melton advised; then turning to Ella, he asked: "What is your price?"

The wild rose flush came and went: "My price is the highest to be had," she replied.

"You are open to an offer?" he suggested.

"I am open to offers," she answered, looking him in the face. "I must make a living wage——"

"Quite right," he put in.

"—I must have the highest price I can get for my work."

He shaped his mouth to a whistle, and walked to one of the windows. His mother followed him.

"Colonel Kedlock is quite right about these people," she exclaimed. "They are never content, he says. The more you give them, the more they will want; and the more you do for them, the more you must do."

"All the same, mother dear, you'd better ask papa about the lace," her son advised. "It would be a pity to let it go out of the family. If Royalty sees it you'll not have a chance. Papa is in. I saw him just now."

The duchess, all aflicker, hurried from the room.

Lady Ann stood looking up at Ella. She would like to have said something kind to this wonderful young creature, beside whom she was, in her fair fragile prettiness, as a white violet is to an arum lily, but she was too shy to speak. Her brother stood with his back to them, looking out into the park, and flipping his leg with his riding-whip. Suddenly he exclaimed, without turning: "Some one's calling you, Ann."

Ann lifted her head like a startled fawn, and although she did not hear any one calling, ran incontinently from the room, acting upon the suggestion like one hypnotised.

The young man had affected languor so far, but the languor gave way to alertness the moment his sister had gone. He came close to Ella and looked into her face nervously, eagerly, in confusion. He wanted to speak; there was need for haste; but the words would not come.

"Won't you—won't you—sit down?" he stammered at last, pushing a chair towards her.

"I would rather stand, thank you," she answered.

He flicked his leg with his whip, looked about him, looked at her again. Her face was on a level with his own. Words rushed to his lips now which he did not want to utter, but he could not restrain himself. "You are very beautiful," he blurted out. "You know I think so. You know I pass your window every day just to catch a glimpse of you."

"I know," she answered impassively.

The answer disconcerted him. He had no experience or theory by which to interpret her compelling self-possession.

"I have longed to hear you speak," he said. "Your voice, now that I hear it at last, is—is all that I expected."

He had intended to say something more flattering, but suddenly felt afraid to be fulsome. He took up the gossamer lace: "This is the kind of thing you should wear yourself," he said.

"When the time comes, I shall," was the unexpected reply.

The young man was silenced. He did not know what to make of the answer, and began to fear that the girl was strange, which meant pretty much the same thing to him as objectionable. She saw that she had made an unfavourable impression and smiled to remove it. The smile he understood; there was nothing enigmatic in that. There were things in nature to which it corresponded in its effect upon him—sunshine on the sea, moonlight, the perfume of flowers, silence broken by an impassioned nightingale in the clear dark of a starlight night; all delicate refined emotions in their first freshness. Once more the colour rose in his dark cheek. He had no definite intention with regard to the girl. He was one to drift rather than to intend; to feel rather than to think; to prolong the pleasures of life instinctively by helping himself to small portions at a time. His fastidious taste was satisfied with dainty morsels. To gulp down large quantities in haste was abhorrent to him. He took wine enough to exhilarate him and brighten his wits, but the drop more which might have disturbed the balance and loosened his tongue unduly or endangered his self-control he would not touch. Speed was his one excess. To travel at the highest speed, to ride like the devil, to walk as if for a wager, when he was travelling, riding, or walking, to go headlong when he was going at all, was imperative; but at other times his movements were slow, and people who met him casually talked of his habitual languor. He had not attempted to make Ella's acquaintance. Just to see her from a distance had been enough so far to expand his heart and raise his spirits with a thrill. But now, in her presence, the first torment of passion, which nature for her own purposes uses all her power to render unendurable in the young,

unexpectedly beset him, and would have driven him to the extreme of confession in another minute had not his mother flickered back into the room.

"Oh, Ninian, you do look so like yourself—when you were a little boy, you know," she burst out. "I've seen you look like that so often. Ah—" the little hands went out to him—"how I wish you were a little boy still! I miss my babies."

The inconsequent little lady was one of those who see a great deal without catching the import of anything. The look she had surprised on Ninian's face was the look of a naughty boy who thought himself caught, and it set her mind off at a tangent to the days when he was always being caught, but she missed its significance now. It was the lovely little boy and not the naughty one that the mother's heart recalled.

"Where is Ann?" she babbled on, but did not wait for an answer. "I've seen your father."

Ninian stood twirling the ends of his moustache, first on one side and then on the other, nervously: "Well?" he said.

"He wanted to know who had made the lace, and how long it had taken to make it, and what it was like, and a great deal more," the duchess went on, just as if Ella had not been there; "and when I told him, he said, 'Well, offer her two hundred pounds, and, if that isn't enough, offer her three.' It's perfectly absurd," said the duchess, addressing Ella.

"I will take three hundred pounds," Ella said indifferently.

"It's much too large a sum for a girl in your position," the duchess was beginning, but seeing her son make a gesture of impatience, she gave in. "I will—I will—send you the money."

Ella began to fold up the lace: "I shall be able to trust it to your grace's messenger, I suppose?" she asked.

"Oh—won't you leave it?" her grace fairly gasped.

"I cannot promise to keep it for your grace," Ella answered. "I may have an opportunity of selling it for a higher price before I hear from your grace again. I am in great need of money."

She curtsied when she had spoken, and was about to leave the room, but Melton interposed.

"Stop a moment!" He turned to his mother. "Why not pay at once?" he said impatiently. "Or stay, shall I draw a cheque for you?"

"Oh, if you would, Ninian!" the duchess exclaimed, with a gasp of relief.

To owe money to Ninian, who never bothered about money whether he owed it or it was owed to him, and to have her own safe in the bank and the lace in her possession at the same time, gave her the satisfying sense of having made the best bargain of her life, and the little lady was great at a bargain.

Melton left the room and returned with the cheque in an envelope which he gave to Ella.

She coolly took it out and looked at it.

"It is for guineas," she said. "The agreement was for pounds."

The young man flushed: "Won't you—" he was beginning, but she drew herself up, and he stopped short, took the cheque from her, and left the room.

"You give a great deal of trouble, young woman," the duchess said peevishly. She felt no more concern or responsibility with regard to the money, and was very tired of the whole business by this time.

Ella remained impassive.

When Melton returned, she took the corrected cheque from him, and put it in her pocket, this time without looking at it. She knew that there would be no more mistakes. She had taught him a lesson.

Once more she opened her parcel, and spread the lovely lace out over a chair, then stood for a moment gazing at it. She felt the parting. It was like parting with something of herself, so intimate was her relation to it, so worked up into it were the crowding thoughts, the swift emotions of the long days during which she had been engaged upon it. There was a reminder for her of something felt, planned, suffered, hoped, in every part of the pattern. But she was not wishing the beautiful thing farewell. "Till I see you again," was more in her mind than a leave-taking.

Having looked her last, she made her curtsy again, to the duchess first, then to Lord Melton, and left the room.

"Now! what do you think of that, Ninian?" his mother exclaimed.

"I'm a convert to the doctrine of re-incarnation," he answered lightly.

"I don't understand you," she said, looking puzzled.

"A young queen come back," he suggested, "with all the dignity of her royal state remembered."

"I wish Ann could be taught to curtsy," the duchess said. "She lost her balance when she was presented."

"I know," he rejoined; "and the Queen lost her countenance."

"Oh, Ninian, dear, you do say such funny things!" his mother laughed. "But what do you think of that girl? Is she a Socialist or what? She seems very mercenary. And I am sure she suspected you were going to cheat her out of some of the money."

"No, it was not that she suspected," he answered.

"And, oh!" the duchess cried, "she gave you no receipt."

"A cheque is a receipt in itself," he said. "She'll give you a receipt when it's honoured."

"How dreadful!" said the duchess. "She can't be a nice girl."

"She's straight enough, anyhow," Melton muttered. "But I must go, mother. Excuse me," and he made his escape.

It was dinner-time at Red Rose Farm when Ella walked into the kitchen. Her stepmother and half-sister Harriet were just dishing up a meagre meal of vegetables boiled in stock with suet dumplings. Flipperty was looking on somewhat hungrily, but with a valiant effort to keep up his spirits. "It's a poor heart that never rejoices," he was saying. "Dish up the dinner of herbs with contentment, good wife. Where's Robert? Oh, here he is. Never mind about putting on your dress clothes, my son. Just wash yer 'ands and sit down."

Robert remained unmoved by this facetiousness. He glanced at them all as he came in, and a second time at Ella, but made no more sign of seeing them than if they had all been tables and chairs, and nobody noticed him but his father. The taciturnity was general. There was no ill-nature in it, however. It was a symptom of exhaustion from overwork on insufficient food.

Ella went to a little table in the window, where were a rusty pen and a penny bottle of ink. She sat down and signed the cheque with difficulty, for every scratch of the pen had to

be repeated two or three times to make it mark. Then she waited for the ink to dry, looking down at it the while as it lay on the table before her. It was the expression of her face that had caused Robert to glance at her again. She was glowing with joy. This was the first great moment of her life. She had fought her first round with the enemy and triumphed. The spoils of victory were in her hand. She could give!

"Father!" she cried, with a catch in her breath, jumping up and waving the cheque: "Father, here's peace and plenty for you, for a while to come, at any rate."

Flipperty looked at her: "What's gone to your head, Miss Banks?" he asked.

"Play actin'," her stepmother sourly averred.

Ella's hand with the cheque in it sank to her side. Her exaltation was not extinguished by a cold douche, but the expression of it changed. Her father's spectacles were lying on the mantelpiece. She fetched them and put them on his nose. Then she held up the cheque so that he could see it.

"'Pay Miss Ella Banks or Order the sum of three hundred pounds,'" he read. "Three hundred pounds!" he gasped, and gazed at Ella over his spectacles with his mouth open.

The rest of the family gathered round and looked at the cheque in awe, with the exception of Robert, who looked at Ella.

"It's for you, father," she said.

"But—but how's it come?" he stammered.

"It's come of my lace," Ella replied with suppressed exultation. "The duchess has bought it."

She put the cheque into her father's hand. He turned it over and over, considering, hesitating, without a glimmer of his habitual facetiousness. His gravity lent something of dignity even to his figure of a turnip radish.

"I can't take it, my girl," he said at last. "I don't think I can. Rightly put out to interest it might bring you in a matter of twelve or fifteen pounds a year. That's good money."

"These hands and this head are good for as much and more," Ella answered confidently. "And I owe you this, father. It's my board and lodging and house room. Doesn't mother say I'm nothing but a fine lady? I must pay accordingly."

"Eh, an' I did say it," her stepmother confessed with remorse, wiping her eyes on the corner of her apron. "An the times I've called you an idle hussy, sittin' there in the parlour doin' fancy work as no good ever came of that I could see, jest like a fine lady."

"You needn't fret about that, mother," Ella rejoined. "I knew what I was doing, and you didn't, but that wasn't your fault, and I never blamed you."

Robert took the cheque from his father's hand and examined it, then he looked inquiringly at Ella: "You said the duchess had bought the lace," he observed. "She did not draw this cheque."

Ella explained without embarrassment. Robert gave the cheque back to his father, and sat down at the table on which the frugal meal was cooling. He made no further remark, but there seemed to be something still on his mind.

Ellery began to inspect the cheque anew.

"There's more than enough for the debts by a long chalk," he ejaculated. "What shall I put the rest of the money into?"

"Put it into manure," was Robert's laconic advice.

The whole of that afternoon Ella lay on her bed thinking. The next morning at daylight she was in her usual place at the window with her lace pillow on her lap, hard at work again. Her stepmother, soon after, brought her a cup of tea and a thick slice of bread and butter.

"I've misunderstood you, Ella Banks," she said, and the tears rose to her eyes, which were naturally kindly, but with a strained expression always in them now, like that of an over-driven beast of burden. "I've bin thinkin' of you all night, settin' here uncomplainin'. I couldn't sleep fur thinkin'. You never answered me back, an' I wish you had. If you'd told me—There's many a time yer back must 'a' ached, an' a cup o' tea ud 'a' bin a help. I've not done my best by you, Ella, an' you a motherless girl."

Ella took the rough red toil-worn hand in hers, drew her stepmother to her, and kissed her. The good woman's eyes overflowed. She looked at Ella's delicate, beautiful hand as it lay in hers.

"It's a lady's hand," she said.

"It's a lace-maker's hand," Ella corrected her. "There's

all sorts of work to be done in the world, mother, and we've got to see to it that our hands are right for it. If you'd kept your hands like mine where would we all have been? And where would the best butter in the county have been—not to mention the bread," and Ella bit into her slice with a wholesome appetite.

"That's true," her stepmother said with a showery smile, and returned to her work, a shriven penitent, encouraged and refreshed.

In the late afternoon Melton rode by, punctual as the sunset. He looked up from the moment he rounded the corner, smiling, expectant, with his whip half raised to the salute. But the dark head remained bent, the pure profile cold and unresponsive. Not until he was well past did Ella raise her eyes. He was still in sight, and she looked, looked long, even after he had disappeared. His greyhound slimness showed to the best advantage on his thoroughbred, but it was not admiration that shone in her eyes. It was rather a look of intentness as of one earnestly engaged in considering some serious question.

CHAPTER IX

THE morning after the purchase of the lace, Lena Kedlock, in her outdoor things, playing about in one of the corridors of the Castle, encountered the duchess. The little lady threw her a "Well, Lena!" with a smile and half a dozen friendly little nods as she passed. Lena responded to the salutation with proper respect, walked on a few steps, then turned and followed the duchess on noiseless feet, mimicking her walk and the funny little flickering movements of her hands, accurately, and with much pleasure to herself.

But this game was of short duration. The duchess disappeared, and Lena was left alone again with nothing in the way of mischief to divert her.

When Lena first came to the Castle the duchess had wished to include her in the Bible lesson, but Lena had skilfully excused herself.

"It is so kind of you," she said; "but I always read with

my father in the morning"—which was true, but it conveyed a false impression to the unsuspecting little lady. Colonel Kedlock had his own rooms at the Castle, and he and his daughter always breakfasted there together alone, reading the whole time—Lena deep in one of the French novels her father left lying about in careless profusion, the Colonel himself content with *La Vie Parisienne*.

The duchess afterwards gave the duke her own version of the story, and remarked upon it: "How very sweet of Colonel Kedlock, is it not? He really is both father and mother to that poor little girl. What good people there are in the world!—such unexpected people, too! It just shows one should never judge. Colonel Kedlock seemed to me the last sort of man. But I suppose you knew him better?"

The duke said, "H'mph!"

The little duchess could not forget Colonel Kedlock's goodness. The recollection of it enlivened her day. She and Lady Ann read the Psalms together that morning, cursing their enemies and blessing themselves verse by verse with more than their usual fervour, and in the intervals the duchess thought of that excellent father improving the mind of his wild little girl, and was uplifted by the thought.

Lena, this morning, roaming the corridors, came next upon Lady Ann.

"Is that you, Lena? Do you want me?" Lady Ann asked timidly.

"It is me," Lena snapped back. "And I do want you. Of course I always want you. Where's Eustace?"

"I was going to ask you."

"I haven't seen him this morning, and I'm cross with him."

"Oh, you mustn't be cross with Eustace," Lady Ann remonstrated. "He's probably looking for you."

"He's looking with his eyes shut, then," Lena grumbled; "for I've been visible here above the horizon to the naked eye for the last two hours."

She caught Ann's hand as she spoke, and they ran down the grand staircase together into the hall, where their sudden appearance caused three menservants, who had their heads together over a newspaper, to separate hastily. Mr. Grainger, the duke's man, having been sent for the newspaper, had taken

the liberty of opening it in order to satisfy his mind on a point which concerned himself. Mr. Peel, groom-of-the-chambers, coming by just then, was also reminded of a personal interest by the sight of the newspaper and stopped to ask a question. And Benjamin, a quite inferior person in plush, got up solely for show, but ranking for the moment, under the levelling influence of a common excitement, as a human being of like passions, had confidently put his powdered head together with the two undecorated ones, to hear the news which Mr. Grainger was reading aloud.

The men jumped to attention with suspicious alertness when the young ladies appeared, and Mr. Grainger prepared to make off, but lynx-eyed Lena saw the paper being hurriedly smoothed out and refolded, and understood. She was the reverse of the duchess in that she caught the import of all that she saw—and she managed to see everything that came within range of her vision, the result being a premature knowledge of several things with which it is thought undesirable that young ladies should become acquainted.

“What’s the odds?” she said airily.

Mr. Grainger hurried off discreetly with the paper to the duke. The other two, standing to attention like automata with blank countenances in which the eyes alone were movable, cast the onus of an answer on each other by exchanging glances.

“One of you tell me,” Lena exclaimed with an impatient stamp, “or his grace shall know why his paper is late this morning. You, Benjamin!”

Benjamin, the stalwart young footman, coughed off his confusion behind his hand, while Mr. Peel surreptitiously withdrew.

“I did hear it said this morning, miss,” Benjamin stated categorically, “that *Bantock* was first, *Gemma* second, *Idol* third, and the rest nowhere.”

“Saved this time!” Lena cried, clapping her hard little hands together, though who was saved, herself or the delinquents she had threatened to betray, did not appear. “Where is Lord Eustace?” she went on in the same breath.

Before she could be answered, Eustace himself came out of a room off the hall. Lena darted towards him. “I want you,” she said imperatively. “Come in here.”

She dragged him back into the room he had just left, and

slammed the door. Ann, cut off without ceremony, looked after them, too timid to follow, and in doubt as to what she should do next, as she always was when there was no one at hand to order. She flushed in her perplexity and hovered about, unaware of Benjamin, who stood drawn up to attention respectfully. Servants were merely a part of the furniture of her life. She knew them by sight and by name and for their various uses, as she knew the chairs and the tables and the clocks, but was only conscious of their presence for the moment that she required their services. As human beings capable of criticism they did not exist for her.

"Ann! Ann!" Lena had opened the door again and was calling to her. "Just put on your things, and wait till I've had it out with Eustace; then we'll go for a walk."

Taking it for granted that Ann would obey this order, when she had fired it at her point-blank, she shut the door.

Eustace stood polishing his eyeglass: "What is the matter with me?" he asked plaintively, and then carefully adjusted the eyeglass in his right eye, as though the better to see the point.

His voice was musical, as Melton's was, with the soft caressing tone and quality which only comes of ages of cultivation and refinement; but, unlike Melton, who was merely deliberate, Eustace spoke with hesitation, as if words were hard to find. At the first glance he looked like the replica of his brother. They were about the same height, both slim, both dark with black hair, both wore a small moustache, shaped like a cupid's bow, and soft and glossy as a blackbird's wing. In a detailed description no difference would appear, yet they were different. There was no mistaking one for the other. With only three years' seniority, Melton was already mature both in appearance and manner; but Eustace was one of those who never quite grow up. To the last he would have something boyish about him, something diffident, as well as casual and inconsequent.

Lena stood before him with her arms akimbo.

"I'm not proud of you," she said.

"Why? What is the—er—matter?"

"A cow is the matter."

"A cow!—what—er—on the round earth do you mean?"

"Didn't you drive over a cow the other day?"

"I knocked one over—now I think of it."

"Now you think of it! That's just it; you don't think."

"No—why should I?"

"You have not even made kind inquiries about her health."

"Was there any necessity?" He took out his eyeglass, polished it, and replaced it. "But I hope she is quite well."

"Hope is out of the question," Lena rejoined. "The cow lost her calf, and now she's lost her life."

"Very sorry, I am sure," Eustace declared. "Shall I put on mourning?"

"I should like to see you put on some consideration for the owner. He's a poor man."

"I—I'll try to feel for him. What else can I do?" Eustace had his mother's hesitation about parting with money.

"It's incredible that you should ever ask such a question when there is only one thing to be done under the circumstances," Lena exclaimed hotly. "It betrays an impossible depth of indifference to the sufferings of others——"

"I am sorry if the cow suffered——"

"You're hateful," she cried. "You don't care a rap for the poor man's loss. He's been to my estimable father about it. It seems that there was no witness to the accident but John Body, and John Body is ready to swear that it was the cow's fault—was it?"

"Well, n—no," Eustace honestly confessed. "I was driving full tilt and not looking out. In fact, I think I was looking back at something when I ran into the cow."

"John Body is a slimy sycophant," Lena exclaimed, with a grimace, as at something that tasted nasty.

"What does your father—er—say?" Eustace asked.

"He smiles on John Body's version, and says if we pay when the cow was in fault, it will just encourage these people to be uppish, and bring them down upon us for compensation on all sorts of occasions. My father didn't ask you for your version of the story?" Eustace shook his head. "It wouldn't have been safe," Lena chuckled. "But what are you going to do?"

"What can I do?" he drawled.

"You can go this moment and pay for the damage done, just as if you were a common honest man—nice change for

you. Pay for the cow and the calf and the man's feelings. Where's your pride?—protector of the poor, guardian of their interests, feudal lord—and all the rest of it: what is it you're always talking about, you rulers and governors, 'Keepin' 'em down,' isn't it? 'Keepin' 'em in their proper place'? Are you going to do that by squeezing them? by making them bitter against you? by treating them meanly? You know what I mean. I wish I could express it!"

"You seem to be able to express—er—a precious lot," Eustace commented with discomfort in his voice; "who taught you all this cant?"

"'Keepin' 'em down'? 'Keepin' 'em in their proper place'?—that's my estimable father when he's discussing 'these cursed Radical times' with yours."

"But you don't seem to see it from estimable father's point of view," he objected.

"No," she retorted. "I'm always trying to see it from the point of view of the kept down. I was kept down at school myself, and I didn't like it." She took a step nearer to him, and smiled up into his face. "Your moustache is all out of shape," she said, "let me curl it up."

She gave it a twirl on either side, and ended with a pat on his cheek.

"You will pay, dear, promise me?" she coaxed.

"Oh, yes. I will pay—all right," he promised.

"Well, give me a kiss."

The young man laughingly complied.

"What nice white teeth you have!"—this by the way. "And you'll pay now, this minute," she insisted with another kiss. "Get the money at once. They're poor people. And it will 'keep 'em down' better if they know you paid off your own bat without being forced. They'll say you're a real gentleman. Nothing keeps 'em down like making 'em look up to you, as pa says when he scowls at them. I wish you would think, Eustace. You just kill the cow and say you are sorry, and because you said you were sorry, you think no more about it. You don't enter into the feelings of these fellow creatures of yours or appreciate what such losses mean to them. Why don't you talk to them? Christ died for them. I bet He thinks much more of them than of you. They are human be-

ings—much more human than you are, you artificial product of an overheated conservatory.”

“I do talk to them.”

“Yes, no doubt. You say, ‘How are you, Byles?’ and you are so pleased with your own condescension, so certain that the clodhopper will be gratified because you remember his name, so altogether sure that you’ve done a good deed and will have your reward, that you don’t hear his reply. Talk to the people.”

“What about?”

“Talk to them about their insides, that’s the popular topic—‘How duz yo’ sym’toms seem ter segashuate?’—it’s not extraordinary either. We’re all deeply interested in our own insides. Tell them what you can’t eat, and you’ll be in touch with them directly.”

He took a turn about the room and came back to her. “I see—er—what you’re driving at,” he said. “I’m more human than you think.”

“Prove it.”

“I will.”

They sealed the compact with another kiss.

In one way or another the sixteen-year-old minx could always twist Eustace round her little finger, and all the more easily because he thought of her as only a chit, and was not on his guard. He followed her out into the hall now, where they found Ann patiently waiting in her walking things.

“What shall we play at next?” Lena asked.

“I’m ready for anything,” Eustace declared.

Lena turned on him. “Now, isn’t that like you!” she exclaimed. “What a pity it is that your memory is not as good as your nature.”

“What—er—is the matter with my memory?” he remonstrated, taking out his eyeglass and readjusting it.

“I should have made you tie two knots in your handkerchief,” she snapped. “Here, where is it?”—she pulled it out of his pocket, and gave it to him.

“Now, tie one.”

“To oblige you,” he said, tying the knot, “though I don’t know what on earth you are up to—there!” He held it out to her.

"Now tie another."

He did so.

"Now take a knot in each hand, and say after me: Right hand, 'cow.' Left hand, 'compensation.'"

"Oh!" said Eustace, enlightened.

"This minute, you promised," Lena cried, indicating the whole earth and all that therein is with a comprehensive wave of her hand in the direction he should take; then smiled her irresistible smile at him: "We shall meet again anon," she called back to him from the hall door, which Benjamin, bowing low, was holding open.

Lena, grasping Ann's plump arm, or as much of it as her bony fingers could encompass, shot her out into the open air. She called this taking Ann for a walk, but pushing her like a perambulator would have better described the action. Walking, besides, was not a form of exercise that Lena herself often took. Her superfluous energy drove her to more vigorous exertion, and all the running, jumping, and scrambling she could do hardly sufficed to work it off, although she was usually doing one or the other. But she had her quiescent moments too, moments of intensity, during which her body was crouching for a spring, so to speak, with nerve and muscle taut to serve the busy mind. She did not trouble to consult Ann now as to which direction they should take; she imposed her will upon her.

"I want to go and see that girl with 'he nimbus," she said.

"Nimbus?" Ann queried, out of breath.

"You know"—Lena whirled her hand in a circle round her head. "What's her name?"

"Do you mean Beryl Blatchford at the Rectory?"

Lena meant Beryl Blatchford. "Oh, but it might not be convenient at this time of day," Ann suggested.

"You don't know Mamma Blatchford, dear child," Lena chuckled.

"But you've only seen her once," Ann reminded her.

"Quite enough," Lena assured her with a grin. "She's one of those people you can be quite sure of on a short acquaintance."

"But isn't that a nice character?" Ann asked.

"Well, it doesn't leave you in doubt, there's that to be said for it," Lena answered; "so you needn't be afraid of intruding. I tell you that woman would put off her own funeral—somehow—to entertain you."

"Why?" exclaimed innocent Ann.

Lena looked around, and sunk her voice mysteriously: "Because," she whispered, "because your pa is a dook."

"Oh, Lena, how can you be so absurd!" Ann exclaimed, laughing.

To her unsophisticated little mind such a reason was unthinkable. There is no more arrant snob, when he is a snob, than the snob of good birth; but let the well-born escape the taint, and he becomes rarefied with refined simplicity. The Brabants had escaped the taint. If they had any consciousness of rank at all, they hid it successfully. Family affection was what they showed; family pride never. Life at Castlefield Saye had a rich setting, but they lived it simply enough.

"I want to see that girl with the nimbus again," Lena repeated.

"Why?" Ann asked.

"Oh, I don't know," Lena answered casually. "She's good to look at. A sweetie. There was a girl at the convent like her."

"Was it nice at the convent?" Lady Ann wanted to know.

"No, horrid," was the emphatic reply; "at least I hated it. Sending me there was punishing me because my mother died. If she had lived, I shouldn't have been put in prison."

"Oh, but your father meant it kindly, and my mother says it was the best thing to do," Ann hastened to assure her in the hope of calming her troubled retrospect; "and surely the nuns were kind?"

"Yes, according to their light," Lena said bitterly. "Have you ever noticed that people who 'act according to their light' or 'with the best intentions' always make a mess of it? It's a charitable way of blaming them. Charity long endures the sufferings of others, and is kind to those who don't bother. The nuns made a mess of it with me."

Ann had noticed none of these things, but she wanted to know how the nuns had made a mess of it.

"Open your eyes and look at me," said Lena.

Ann did so involuntarily, but she only saw Lena's bright dark eyes with their long black eyelashes, and the strong fine line of her black eyebrows in picturesque contrast to the mass of her fair curly hair. She missed the moral which a more experienced eye would have read in the ill-nourished physique of the tall girl of sixteen, thin almost to emaciation, and bloodless, with a look of premature age in her face such as comes of sickness or a hard life. Lena had cause of complaint against the good nuns. In their care for her soul they had been cruel to its fleshly envelope. The growing girl must have building material. Lena especially, with her devouring mind, should have been fed like a caterpillar, and the nuns had made her fast.

"You are as plump as a partridge," she said to Ann. "I expect you have always had enough to eat."

"But so have you, surely!" Ann cried, shocked at the bare suggestion of privation.

"Not by any means," Lena answered. "My recollections of my 'happy schooldays' will always be hungry. I used to be sent to pray and repent in a cold chapel on an empty stomach, and all the time I could think of nothing but things to eat. I used to imagine a feast to begin with, but I always came down to a loaf of bread, and if I could have got one, I should have swallowed it whole to ease this aching void"—she clasped her hands on her waist-belt. "They told me to pray, and I did, fervently. I used to say, 'Lord, give me something to eat!' till I was black in the face."

"But didn't you complain? Didn't you tell them?" Ann asked in distress. She was pale with sympathy.

"No," said Lena. "That's queer, too," she reflected. "I never did. I tried my hardest to make them think that I didn't care."

"But why did they punish you so?"

"Once it was because I looked over a wall," Lena said. "I didn't know that there was a man on the other side, but they wouldn't believe me when I said I didn't know, so, because they wouldn't believe me, I vowed that I'd have looked all the more if I had known. I'd never thought of men before, but after that I was always thinking about them. . . . But, generally it was for things I said that they punished me. They

wanted to make me sorry I spoke, and I never was. There were so many things I wanted to know about, and I asked questions; but, instead of answering me, they put me on bread and water for forty-eight hours at a time, and not enough of the water even. When you're hungry, for long, it makes you feel sick. They said my sins were as scarlet, and that was their way of taking the colour out of them. So now you know why my hair is as white as wool."

"But it isn't as white as wool," said the literal-minded Ann, after a glance at Lena's tangle of tow.

"You wait till I wash it," said Lena darkly.

There was a pause, then she rattled on again. "There was another little girl at the convent—naughty too, but not in the same way. She used to forget some of the nagging little rules and break them; and they starved her for that, and she couldn't bear it. She was not so strong as I was, and she used to moan and cry till I thought it would kill her, and I couldn't bear that. So I used to go down at night and steal food for her. I didn't eat any of it myself. I abstained by way of penance for stealing it; and it was a penance too, sometimes! I must have stolen tons, I think, for that poor little girl; that was sport and I loved it; but they found me out at last, and turned me out—less for the stealing though than for the things I said to them, for my eloquence"—Lena laughed—"and for the screed I sent to anxious parents on the danger of death under torture by slow starvation."

"You were expelled then?" Ann said in a horrified tone.

"Oh, yes, I was expelled all right—for stealing—also because the child I stole for, and several others, were taken away from the convent by anxious parents on the strength of my screed. So here I am, a disgrace in clover—and I'm hungry still, though I've eaten an ox since I came; but the Lord will provide."

"Lena, dear, do you mind if I say it?" Ann remonstrated. "I don't think it is quite nice to talk like that——"

"Like what?" Lena asked with affected innocence.

"Why as you do—about your sins are as scarlet, you know, and the Lord will provide—things in the Bible. I don't think it is nice to speak in such a way about sacred things."

"Holy Moses!" Lena ejaculated. "See how my religious

education has been neglected! The nuns never told me my sins were sacred."

"That is not what I mean," faltered the bewildered Ann. "But 'white as wool,' you know, and all that, as you say it—it is—it is not nice."

"There, then," said Lena, repentant in view of Ann's inarticulate distress. "I'll be good to please you. It doesn't seem to come naturally to me though," she added on reflection.

"If you would only try," Ann pleaded.

"Then you don't think me good," Lena came down on her at once.

"I—I didn't mean that," Ann hurriedly apologized.

Lena's wicked eyes twinkled. But there was a big heart in her naughty lean bosom. If her nimble tongue was apt to tease, it was without intent to wound. It was not in her to inflict pain at close quarters, and her life would be lived at close quarters. Things, consequences, that might happen afar off in time or place could cause her no concern. The present was her time, and she had to live in it. The impulse to relieve pain companions the desire to please; and to give pleasure was a passion with Lena. It is a passion with many women; a passion destined to carry some of them to inexcusable lengths of self-sacrifice.

Lena was cogitating deeply.

"It's queer," she said at last, "why you were born good and I was born bad. It would have been fairer to give us our choice. I shouldn't have chosen to be bad if I had been asked—although," she added frankly, "I shouldn't have chosen to be you either."

"Oh, Lena," Ann remonstrated, "God made us."

"I know," Lena answered. "That's the puzzle. He made you what you are and me what I am, else He isn't omnipotent. He must have some good use for the bad people."

"But you are not bad, Lena," Ann earnestly assured her, feeling the word out of proportion. "You are naughty sometimes"—mamma often said that Lena was naughty, very naughty—"and you do talk so—so queerly." She hesitated, then added shyly, with a good protestant blush for touching the subject: "If only you would pray, you know." This was the bed-rock of all mamma's teachings, and, the instant Ann was on it, she felt safe.

"What am I to pray about if I am not bad?" Lena asked with a suppressed chuckle.

Ann fairly wrung her hands in the effort to formulate her nebulous meaning.

"We are none of us good, you know—good enough, I mean," she said. "The best of us could be better."

"The Lord make us better then," Lena said with a shrug, easing off a vague sense of injustice with the impertinence. Her irreverence was the effervescence of some such feeling as a rule, the froth stirred up with bubble and hiss by the rage of it.

Their easiest way to the Rectory would have been by the path which the duke had climbed up from the village the day before, but Lena being in command of the expedition had headed it off the path, and they were now adventuring at a scramble straight down the wooded hill. Lena naturally avoided all beaten tracks; her instinct was to make a bee-line to her object, whatever it might be.

Mrs. Blatchford and her eldest daughter Beryl—with the nimbus—were sitting that morning hard at work, mending stockings, of which there was a huge pile in front of them, and many that required hard work; for the Rectory was full of expensive little Blatchfords, brought into the world as recklessly as young sparrows, presumably on some sort of understanding that the income which had only just sufficed for two would miraculously expand of itself into enough for ten, as occasion required. Unfortunately the income had not expanded, and the consequence was short commons at the Rectory, anæmia, worry, and all the other evils, mental and physical, entailed by insufficient means. As a result Mrs. Blatchford had become one of those people who have difficulties with themselves in the morning. They will tell you that it is not their best time; and Mrs. Blatchford's family could have told you things to prove it in her case, things for which they all, including her husband, secretly blamed her, ignoring the fact that these things were an effect of which the family, and particularly her husband, were the cause. For Mrs. Blatchford was a healthy, good-natured woman until five children in excess of what she was constitutionally capable of safely producing, or had the means to support, had told on her temper by ruining her health.

This morning had begun with difficulties; but happily, after having again seen the duke, Mrs. Blatchford felt better. To many people the good gentleman meant nothing very definite. He produced no more effect than a neutral tint. It required an effort to remember if his face were bearded in any fashion or not. There are men to be met with everywhere just like him, English of the English, recalling the period of mutton chop whiskers though without these embellishments, clean and fresh in their well-cut clothes, giving an impression of extreme respectability, and with that air of assurance which is said to come of the habit of command—command of men it used to be, but now it means command of money. And to Mrs. Blatchford, among others, the duke as a man meant nothing to speak of. It was to the position that she bowed. Duke—dukedom! What import in the world! a whole panorama of possessions, with all the homage like incense burnt in the hope of obtaining a share. Mrs. Blatchford frankly entertained the hope. The golden nimbus of her daughter was surely worthy of a coronet. Many a lovely daughter has been taken from a country parsonage and set on high—or dropped in the mud. There are markets for beauty everywhere.

The pathetic history of a mother's devotion, of her heroic self-sacrifice and patient endurance, was wrought into every garment that Beryl wore, into every cultured grace that made her attractive; and Beryl accepted the service as a matter-of-course, and would have exacted as much more had it been humanly possible to render it. Because of the querulousness to which the chronic lack of physical ease gave rise, and also on account of certain tricks of manner which irritated her, she incessantly found fault with her mother in her own mind. She saw no set-off to these annoyances in her mother's devotion, and considered that she had good cause of complaint. She felt that Providence had been unjust to her in not having given her a different mother. She was in all essentials a daughter of the day, with the underlying affection of a daughter for her mother covered up by a top-dressing of discontent, which promoted the growth of a high sense of superiority, from which she derived a good opinion of herself in contradistinction to her opinion of her mother; an opinion giving evidence of that inability to appreciate, which is the

sure sign of a small mind thinking meanly. Great good qualities are quiescent; it is the small faults that keep up the disturbing jar and fret of our daily lives, and it takes a fine nature to suffer the discomfort without losing all proper sense of proportion. And Beryl Blatchford's nature was not fine.

"How have they cleaned your white serge?" Mrs. Blatchford asked. "You'll be wanting it now that The Family is back."

"It looks horrid," said Beryl pettishly, "and it will look worse at the Castle. All my things look second-hand. I never have anything fresh."

Mrs. Blatchford's heart contracted, but Beryl gave her no credit for suffering as much on the subject as she did. It was one of her grievances against her mother that she did not dress her better.

"I wish I could get you a new one," Mrs. Blatchford said, sighing.

"Where there's a will ——" Beryl muttered, ungraciously. The pettish mood, showing in her face, marred its beauty at the moment. The mark of such moods is a register of ill-humour, which already, in Beryl's case, threatened to become a permanent disfigurement, so continually did the ugly indication appear there.

Mrs. Blatchford tried to ease her aching back by a change of position, and, failing, gave expression to her ill-ease in another deep sigh and a countenance made woeful by silent endurance. Signs of suffering were disagreeable to Beryl, and she resented them. She had no pity for the ache. She looked at her mother with distaste, and added the sigh as an item to her score of grievances. It stood for audible and irritating complaint. But the sigh had escaped from poor Mrs. Blatchford involuntarily. An appeal for sympathy, articulate or inarticulate, to any member of her family was worse than unavailing, and she knew it. Signs of suffering are apt to disturb healthy modern girls; they object to the discomfort, and retaliate upon the sufferer with accusations of selfishness. The Blatchfords were all impatient of anything that affected their own comfort, and it was not sympathy but blame they had for their mother if by chance she showed herself ill at ease. So vicious circles are formed in families. Mrs. Blatchford's ill-ease found ex-

pression in a countenance full of complaint. This would have been wiped out by smiles had she had the help and comfort of a little sympathy, a little consideration, to strengthen her heart; but these being withheld, her troubles showed, and the unpleasant sight became in turn a trouble to others. A trivial caress from the man who is driven out of the house because he can't stand it any longer, and a "Poor little woman!" tenderly said, would be enough in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred to save the situation.

Beryl held up a dilapidated stocking.

"Look at this!" she exclaimed. "I can't possibly mend it. It will be nothing but darns."

Mrs. Blatchford looked up, not at the stocking, but out of the window, as pious souls look up to heaven for help. Her glance stopped short of appeal to that last resort of the hopeless, however, and the whole expression of her countenance changed.

"Look!" she cried. "There is Lady Ann coming in at the gate—with a girl. Quick! Put those things away!"

She began to scramble the unsightly garments together as she spoke, and crammed them behind the sofa cushion. Beryl had jumped up too, alertly, and was helping. In half a minute no sign of their sordid work was visible.

"Who's the girl with her?" Mrs. Blatchford had time to whisper.

"Lena Kedlock. You know. You saw her the other day. She's staying at the Castle," Beryl rejoined shortly, as if the question were an injury.

Her mother filled in the remaining moments with, "Beryl, don't be so snappy!" and Beryl managed to retort, "I'm *not* snappy!"

Certainly no one would have accused her of it a moment later, when the young ladies were shown in, so angelically sweet was her face, framed in its nimbus of golden hair.

"My dear!" Mrs. Blatchford exclaimed, all smiles, taking Ann's two soft little hands in her own fat flabby ones; "how good of you to come!" She turned to Lena, her cordiality carefully graduated down to the difference of rank. "And this young lady?"

"Lena Kedlock," that young lady answered for herself.

"Oh, of course. We have seen each other before. And I should have known you in any case. You are so like the colonel. And how is he?"

"Oh, he's all right, thank you," Lena answered casually.

"It must be a great pleasure to him to have you at home," Mrs. Blatchford felt sure. "This is your first visit to our neighbourhood, I think?"

"Yes," Lena answered.

"Lena could never come here," Ann explained, "because she always had her holidays when we were in London or up in the north. But she always spent her holidays with us. My mother did not like her to be all the time shut up in a convent."

"You were brought up in a convent!" Mrs. Blatchford ejaculated with marked disapproval.

"Kept down," Lena corrected her.

Mrs. Blatchford looked puzzled. "I hope they did not tamper with your religion," she said seriously.

"I didn't take any with me," Lena answered.

"My dear!" Mrs. Blatchford exclaimed. "You—you don't mean——?"

"Well, I don't know," said Lena, showing her little white teeth in a mischievous grin. "It depends upon what you mean."

"Religion," said Mrs. Blatchford impressively, "is not a thing to be lightly spoken of. Dear Lady Ann, I am sure you agree with me?"

"Oh, yes, she agrees right enough," the casual Lena answered for her. "We had an irreligious discussion coming down the hill."

"Irreligious!" Mrs. Blatchford gasped. Her head was beginning to whirl.

"Yes, mostly," said Lena. "We do a lot of discussing. Ann's intelligence is black and blue from the kicks I give it. She's like you. Thinks me all wrong."

"Oh, no!" Ann remonstrated.

"But I expect there's a chance for me yet," Lena rattled on. "Observe the upward trend of my nose"—she gave that delicate organ a push up with her finger as she spoke, which effectually determined its trend. "My father tells me to follow

my nose sometimes when I ask for directions. He doesn't mean to be polite on those occasions, but he's doing better for me, perhaps, than he thinks. One does a thing in the end without thinking, that one's always being told to do; and I expect I shall be off—up—after my nose one of these days, involuntarily."

Mrs. Blatchford saw nothing but what was objectionable in Lena's glibness. She had decided by this time that Lena was a minx—"and no wonder, with such a father," as she afterwards observed to her husband. The father might have stood for an excuse, but she meant him for an additional reproach, as is usually the case with the unsound of heart, who take a horrid delight in flagellating the neighbour they do not love, not only with his own sins but with the sins of his remotest ancestors also; and if ancestors are not forthcoming to be used for the purpose, there is the sin of not having had any, a punishing lash when dexterously wielded.

Mrs. Blatchford examined Lena's appearance as she talked, appraising its value in the marriage market, and the danger in it to Beryl's chances. This, she considered, was not great. But clearly the minx was uppish, and must be snubbed. Mrs. Blatchford determined to ignore her. She turned to Lady Ann: "And are you going to be very gay at the Castle?" she asked, with a lively note in her voice and an encouraging smile for the Castle, to help it to be gay.

"My mother would like to be quiet," Ann answered. "I know of no plans at present, except a dinner. We are going to dine at Pointz next week."

"A dinner party at Pointz, how delightful! One meets all the best people there."

Mrs. Blatchford rolled "the best people" round on her tongue as if she enjoyed the flavour.

When the girls rose to go, the good lady became fulsome again with thanks to Lady Ann for coming: "It was so very sweet of you, but then you always are so sweet!"

"There, Ann!" Lena exclaimed. "I told you they'd like it." She turned to Mrs. Blatchford. "Ann didn't want to come. She was afraid you might be busy—mending stockings or something."

The colour flamed to Mrs. Blatchford's forehead. She

glanced round the room apprehensively, expecting to see herself betrayed by a tell-tale stocking left lying about.

Lena interpreted these signals aright.

"Hit, that time," slipped from her, *sotto voce*, but Beryl heard and looked pained. So Beryl was hurt. Lena's good-nature sent a flash from her heart to her head. She had to atone, and her uncanny shrewdness showed her the most excellent way.

"Ann," she said, "wouldn't it be nice if Miss Blatchford could come back with us to lunch and spend the afternoon?"

Ann thought it would be delightful if Mrs. Blatchford could spare Beryl. There was no doubt that Mrs. Blatchford could spare Beryl. But how to get her home again through the dark woods was the difficulty. She had no one to send for her.

"Oh, that'll be all right," the ready Lena assured her. "There's sure to be a man about—Melton or somebody—to take care of her."

Mrs. Blatchford could have kissed the minx. Beryl hurried off to dress. Her mother ran after her into the hall.

"Put on your white serge," she whispered in breathless excitement.

"Don't be so fussy, mother," Beryl snapped and the mother's joy was extinguished. But Beryl returned in the white serge. Haste had brought a delicate tinge of colour to her cheeks and she was all animation. Lena looked plain beside her, and Ann insignificant. The mother's heart expanded again. She saw good reason to hope, especially when, late in the day, Beryl returned escorted by Eustace Brabant. If only it had been Melton! But Melton had been out. Still, there was the comfort of supposing that if he had been at home he would have been as much attracted as his brother. And Eustace must have been attracted, for he had stayed by her daughter the whole time. Mrs. Blatchford caressed the golden nimbus, in which she saw a promise of the good things of this world for her daughter, so as in due time they might all enjoy them.

On his return to the Castle, Eustace hunted up Lena. He had deserted her while Beryl was there, but was hungry for her now. Beryl was a delight to the eye, but that organ is soon

satiated with the barren beauty that has nothing to offer the mind for its delight. The finest sight in the world, seen in solitude, does not satisfy for long. In a healthy mind the craving for companionship is deeply implanted; no pleasure is perfect that is not sympathetically shared, and nothing palls sooner than the fair face of a dull woman.

Eustace found Lena in one of the wide corridors, curled up in a big armchair. She was sitting across it, with her back against one arm, and her legs dangling over the other. She had a box of chocolates and the duchess's little Yorkshire terrier on her knee.

"That you?" she said, peeping round the back of the chair when she heard his step. "Done your devotions?"

Eustace drew up another chair, and re-adjusted his eyeglass.

"You have to thank me for that treat," Lena went on.

"Isn't she rather—er—slow, that girl?" he asked. "I could hardly get even a word out of her, let alone an idea."

"Nice change for you after me, I should think," Lena said. "Here, have a chocolate." She held the box out to him. He chose one deliberately.

"A change if you like," he said, "but—er——"

"Er——" Lena mimicked him, and they both laughed, the jolly wholesome laughter, bursting out on the slightest provocation, of two happy young people in perfect accord.

"How about the cow?" Lena asked.

"Oh, amicably settled," he told her; "but they—er—received me rather glumly. However, before I came away, I am sure that—er—they felt it a privilege to have had a cow—er—killed—by one of the family."

"Good old Eustace! Now they'll eat her, I suppose."

"Oh, they had eaten her."

"Kind of eating their cake and having it too, when you paid, I should think."

"Er—yes. That kind of thing—I should think," Eustace got out slowly, choosing another chocolate as he spoke.

Melton, just in from his ride, came striding down the long corridor, flicking the air with his whip—now in the evening light from one of the tall windows, now in the shadow of the space between. Portraits of his ancestors looked down upon

him, and men in armour on pedestals seemed to eye him as he passed.

"Give you good e'en, my lord," Lena cried.

He nodded absently in response to the greeting, but did not stop.

"Love," Eustace guessed.

"Hump," Lena was sure.

And the careless, jolly, senseless laughter broke out afresh.

CHAPTER X

WHY did she not look up? Melton asked himself the question as he rode on. The question implied that she knew he was passing. Melton did not ask himself how he could be so sure of that, and he did well not to ask. He would have lost the assurance if he had and been left in doubt. It is better to know the worst at once. Such assurances come to us all at times, but the inner consciousness must be heard in full faith; it is silenced by a doubt.

Why did she not look up? But, after all, why should she? She was under no obligation to him. Some men would have thought that she was, seeing that it was he, practically, who had bought her lace; he would never see the price of it again. But Melton was generous. He never thought of repayment. Recognition was what he wanted; was all that he wanted. She might have looked up.

He turned off into the woods, bent on a gallop. There was a broad grassy aisle, kept clear of overhanging boughs for many a mile for the purpose. The Brabant thoroughbreds were a pampered race, but pampered with discretion. If the Brabants had turned their attention to the perfecting of their own people in health, strength, beauty, and moral qualities, for as many generations by just the same means—care bestowed on the choice of their parents and on their food and feeding, enough of the best of everything being provided for them, but nothing in excess; on the discipline of their toilet and exercise, the amount of work and rest; the sanitary comfort of their

homes and the exhilarating freshness of their playgrounds; on directing their education and training generally with a view to developing the best that was in them so as to fit them to play their part in life nobly—if all this had been done by the Brabants for their people, as for their horses, they would in the nineteenth century, instead of being the mongrels snarling at each other that they were, have been living like gods together, crowned with health. Oh, strange perversity of the minds of mankind! They desire happiness and habitually neglect the only lasting sources. They neither cultivate nor foster, but recklessly dissipate their chances in the thousand follies of their ill-ordered lives. The misery-making propensities of mankind have always full play; their divine gifts they ruthlessly suppress. They live for themselves and for the moment, instead of for each other and for all time. They substitute the greed of gain, which takes from others to enrich itself and makes no profit in pleasure, for the friendly exchange that gives and takes to the lasting joy of the heart; the incessant quarrels and horrors of war for the wise understandings which ensure peace; the vanity of self-aggrandisement for in honour preferring one another; the inordinate indulgence of their appetites for which they suffer, for the legitimate satisfaction from which good comes; the rage for power which seeks to enslave, for the love of their neighbour which would ennoble both themselves and him; the devil in self for the God in humanity.

All of which, being obvious, clamours for incessant expression. Nobody ever remembers to think about the obvious without a reminder; hence the obviously right thing to do is the thing which is usually not done.

Melton's horse slid into its splendid stride, off and away down the grassy aisle. Horse and rider were as one in the ecstasy of speed. The turf flew from the flying hoofs; the wind whistled by in the wild exhilaration of the pace; thought and care were suspended.

But joy cannot last long at that height. The pace slackened. The gallop became a loping canter, which the rider presently pulled up to a walk. Then thought returned, "Why did she not look up?" This time the answer came, "Why should she?" It was the answer of a young man who in his

modesty finds nothing in himself worthy to attract the coveted exchange of a glance.

Melton flicked the air with his whip and looked about him. "Hello!" some one called cheerily. And down a path on his right Melton saw Adnam Pratt cutting across the wood, and pulled up to wait for him. Adnam had a book under his arm. The two young men were on the most friendly terms. They had been children together. Melton and Eustace had helped to teach the toddling Adnam to walk, and there was still no more consciousness in either of them of any difference in their social positions than there had been in their nursery days.

"Where are you off to, Adnam?" Melton asked.

"Red Rose Farm," Adnam answered, tapping the book under his arm. "I'm going to give Ella a German lesson."

Question and answer were uttered carelessly, but the moment the words were spoken, the two young men looked at each other with altered eyes. Melton noticed for the first time what a good-looking fellow Adnam was; saw Adnam's attractions from the point of view of a young girl, and saw her bound to admire him. And Adnam saw Melton—with a glance that shot back—saw him riding up the road again, gazing at Ella.

He spoke to dissipate a disagreeable impression. "Platinum?" he said, glancing over the horse.

"Yes. He wants exercise," Melton answered shortly, and rode off.

Adnam pursued his way across the dark wood, with bent brows, and a sense of discomfort, an indefinite sense as of things gone wrong.

Earlier in the afternoon, the pretty little blond duchess had flitted through the wood, with drapery fluttering and laces and ribbons afloat. The little lady had one dear friend in this vale of tears with whom she was thoroughly at home. Women of her simple tender nature must have their one dear friend, or die of malnutrition of the heart. The quality they find in this friend is sympathetic insight. To be known for what they are exactly and cared for without criticism is rest and refreshment to the side of their nature which is starved in ordinary social intercourse. Sometimes this one dear friend is an unscrupulous woman of inferior birth and education who uses

her gift of insight to acquire undue influence over a yielding nature for purposes of her own. The duchess had escaped this danger, for her one dear friend was Ursula Pratt—a woman of inferior station, certainly, since her marriage with the good yeoman, but of equal birth; also a woman of high character, and of a generous nature, one to give more than she would take from anybody. Hers was the stronger mind, the greater wisdom, the larger tolerance. She never sat in judgment on the duchess; it was the duchess who sat in judgment upon her. The duchess was prone to be put out by little faults in Ursula Pratt; but Ursula, though quite aware of the duchess's little faults, saw them as she might have seen some flaw in a flower; she noticed the flaw, but did not blame the flower. Ursula's reticence was a point in her character which provoked the duchess. There was this business of the lace. The duchess was exercised in her mind because Ursula had never shown her that lace. Why had she not even told her about it? How could she be so secretive? She knew that the duchess was a connoisseur, always on the look-out for fine specimens of lace.

The duchess awoke in the night and worried about it, and now she was going to Pratt's place to have it out with Ursula. She walked by the short cut, a path which had been specially made for her, and named after her, "The Duchess's Walk," inevitably. It was the only walk she ever took, but she took it pretty often, and the duke said that she owed the preservation of her figure to this last fact. The duchess always sent in the morning to warn Ursula to expect her. This she did in order that Ursula might have time to have some little cakes that she especially liked made for tea.

She found the hall door standing hospitably open and Ursula waiting to receive her. Ursula made her pretty German curtsey to the duchess, as a well-bred Aubon Strelletzen was bound to do. It was from seeing Mrs. Pratt make this curtsey on one occasion that Ella Banks had learnt the pretty trick. The duchess kissed Ursula on both cheeks and gave her hand to old Emery, who was also there. He bowed over the little hand with becoming respect. Generations of right thinking had developed the grand manner in Emery Pratt, the manner which, to be perfect, must be made up of simplicity, self-control, self-respect, kindness and deference. He had a

certain pride in the long line of his own reputable ancestors, on which he based a claim for respect while at the same time deriving from it a sense of the respect due to others.

"What are you doing in the Orchard, Mr. Pratt?" the duchess burst out. "I looked over the hedge as I passed. I never saw such a mess in my life! And Adnam was all mixed up in it."

"Adnam calls it Intensive Culture, your grace," Emery answered, smiling.

"Good gracious!" the duchess exclaimed. "It looks like the abomination of desolation and mud pies! What a pity to spoil your picturesque old Orchard and that dear old field. Surely you've not let Adnam get any dreadful new ideas—jerry-building and that kind of thing. My husband says the country is full of such ideas and we shall all be ruined. Socialism, you know, and all that kind of thing. He says they are making a mess of everything, and really it looks like it in the Orchard."

"I don't know about Socialism," Emery said doubtfully. The word was of ominous import to him also. "Adnam thinks he can make something out of the Orchard, and I'm letting him try. He found it full of rubbish, he said, and he's been breaking up the ground, and carting the rubbish away. It will be good ground when the weeds are out of it."

"Oh, the dear weeds!" cried the duchess. "They were so pretty!"

"But they were not wholesome, and there is no profit to be made out of weeds," Mrs. Pratt reminded her.

"My dear Ursula!" the duchess protested, "surely you have not begun to talk like that! The duke says it is all materialism. People think of nothing but profit now and how to make things pay. You used to have ideals."

"I still have," Mrs. Pratt answered. "I want to see the weeds killed everywhere."

Old Emery found solace in this aspiration though the symbol was obscure to his understanding. He thought of nothing as weeds but those which choked his crops.

"You will come up to my room?" Mrs. Pratt continued, standing aside for the duchess to pass on upstairs.

They always spent their time together in the abbess parlour,

as the duchess called it. She maintained that there was something eminently restful in the cloistral atmosphere of the room. The restfulness came of the severity, the sparseness of the furniture and the form; the satisfying purity of design, and the spaciousness. The general effect could not have been called either old-fashioned or modern. Restful was the only word for it, especially to the duchess, who had subjected herself in some of the rooms she occupied to the restless discomfort of Morris papers, and suffered like one who is hit, but does not know where.

The tea-things stood ready on an old oak gate-legged table. The kettle was simmering over a spirit lamp, and Mrs. Pratt sat down before it, ready to make the tea when the water boiled. The procedure was evidently accustomed. The duchess also took a chair placed ready for her beside the low table, and inspected the cakes, taking off her gloves the while.

"Some of my cakes, I see, you dear!" she said, and took one. There always were some of her cakes, and she always expressed her surprise and pleasure in the same words, and took one. Then she added: "How pretty your table is! Your old silver is so delightful, and your china, and the flowers! Really, you know, Ursula, you did very well to marry Emery Pratt."

"I did not marry him for his plate and china," Ursula rejoined, peeping into the kettle as she spoke to see if the water were coming to the boil.

"No, of course not," the duchess agreed between two nibbles at her cake. "You married him because he's such a dear. I am always glad to think I advised you to accept him. Sometimes I fear I am not a very wise woman, but when I come here, and see you so happy, and so——" the duchess glanced again at the pretty table, "so comfortable, I am reassured."

The duchess sighed, because that doubt of her own wisdom was genuine, but Ursula smiled. The smile relieved her of an inclination she had to shake the duchess's conviction that it was she who had made the match.

The little lady looked round the room once more. She was trying to remember something—oh, the lace!

"Ursula," she burst out abruptly, "you never showed me your lace!"

Mrs. Pratt perceived that a grievance was contained in the accusation. Most women would have offered explanation and excuses, but Mrs. Pratt knew better than most women. There is always a risk of making bad worse with words, however carefully chosen. The only way to wipe out a grievance is to make amends. She looked into the kettle again with the shadow of a smile, then rose deliberately, went to a tall cabinet at the far end of the room, opened the half-doors, unlocked a deep drawer, and brought out some packages. These she put on a little table which she placed beside the duchess, who dropped her cake on the floor in her eagerness, and set to work at once on the precious things.

Mrs. Pratt returned to her place and made tea. While she was waiting for it to infuse, she watched the duchess, who looked like a happy child allowed for a treat to rummage among treasures generally kept from its inquisitive fingers under lock and key.

"Ah, here it is!" she exclaimed at last. "This is the piece you lent to Ella Banks to copy!"

"You've seen it then?" Mrs. Pratt said. "That girl is a genius. I tried among the oldest lace-makers in the county and not one of them had ever seen a specimen of this kind before. The art was quite lost and forgotten until that wonderful Ella recovered it. I am afraid she will be cheated of half the value when she sells it. People are so unscrupulous in the case of a worker who is working to live."

"Make your mind easy then about Ella," the duchess said, beaming benevolently. "I've bought her lace myself—at least Ninian bought it for me," she added, punctiliously telling what had come to be the truth.

"Oh, then," said Mrs. Pratt, relieved, "Ella has been well paid."

"She has been extravagantly paid," said the duchess. "What do you think of three hundred pounds? She must have thought it more than enough herself, for she refused to take guineas."

"How did that come about?" Mrs. Pratt asked, shrewdly divining that thereby hung a tale which, if she knew it, would alter for her the complexion the duchess had put upon the fact.

"She simply refused to take it," the duchess answered. "She's an extraordinary young person."

"She is," Mrs. Pratt agreed. "Extraordinary. You can see there, in my piece, what a wonderful reproduction of a lost art she has accomplished."

"But this is genuine," the duchess deprecated.

"So is Ella's for that matter," Mrs. Pratt maintained.

"Oh, not in the same way," the duchess objected. "This is old—old! It has a history. Ella's will do for a court train or a bridal veil or a robe for a royal banquet. It will *look* all right, but one could never *feel* the same about it."

The duchess again examined the pattern closely, and then looked up at Mrs. Pratt almost with tears in her eyes. It did seem so hard to her that such a thing should have got into the Yeoman Pratt family at all when the noble Brabants had nothing like it. "I never knew," she said, "that people like the Pratts could have such lace. Do they really know about lace? Surely if they did they would have sold it."

The colour rose in Mrs. Pratt's pale face: "The Pratts do know about lace," she said. "That piece was brought into the family by an ancestress of my husband's, a lady who offended her own distinguished family by marrying a yeoman for his high character and fine person. It has a history, you see, and would certainly be the last thing my husband would part with if he had to part with anything."

But the covetous little lady did not give in: "Surely," she said, "between ourselves, you know, Ursula"—she glanced cautiously around—"do you, now *do* you think people of that kind really care as we do?"

"Just as you do," said Mrs. Pratt, proudly identifying herself with "people of that kind" in loyalty to her own good man. "Even the peasants have their family traditions, their family pride, their heirlooms—humble enough, most of them, but no less precious to the possessors, who are less vulgar than some of us in that they value such things for what they stand for as mementoes rather than for their monetary value. They have to be in the last stage of starvation, as a rule, before they will part with them, and when they have parted with them, it is as if they had parted with all that makes for self-respect. You never understand why they should feel it a

degradation to go into the workhouse. I believe that has much to do with it. They are compelled to give up every little cherished possession, to make themselves destitute in a very cruel sense of the word, by our heathen pauper system, or they cannot be taken into the workhouse; and the best of them prefer to starve."

"Dear me, you surprise me," said the duchess comfortably. "I had no idea that people of that kind pretended to such feelings. How can they? Really, now, isn't it a little absurd?"

"Why?" Mrs. Pratt asked, with a shade of indignation in the emphasis she put upon the word. "How can any fine feeling be absurd? What is it upon which civilisation rests in every detail that makes for our good but such fine feelings? The possessions we cherish for the sake of those from whom they come to us are symbols—symbols of love and loyalty. Men and women who have no such feelings in them to begin with are only half human; and if such feelings have existed in them once but have been stamped out by adverse circumstances, they sink degraded, as our paupers sink, into the kind of which it is said that they are hopeless. And they are hopeless. They have been robbed of every respectable attribute, of everything which attaches men and women to the higher side of life; which nourishes the sense of responsibility in them; which distinguishes them from the animals who do nothing to which they are not driven but seek their food, and sleep and eat and drink and die."

"Oh, my dear!" said the duchess. "You quite frighten me. I am afraid you are becoming a Socialist. Are you? Are you?"

"If to be a Socialist is to suffer with my suffering kind, and to yearn for the good time coming when all will have at least a chance of happiness, and a fair share of the comforts of life, then I am a Socialist," Mrs. Pratt answered with a sigh. ,

"Dear, dear," said the duchess, much shocked. "Give me my tea."

Her appetite had happily not been affected by the shock, and the next ten minutes she devoted to the cakes.

"So you think your husband would not part with that

lace?" she harked back at last, tentatively. "But isn't it yours, by the way? Didn't he give it to you?"

"Yes—just as the duke gave you the family jewels."

"Ah, but the jewels are in the entail," the duchess replied "I cannot sell them. It would be theft."

"And it would be a breach of confidence on my part to sell the lace."

"It isn't at all the same thing," said the duchess.

Ursula Pratt again had recourse to a golden silence. The tablets of the duchess's confused little mind were tablets of stone. It was impossible to alter or supplement anything already engraved there. The material was adamantine, and of such a slippery surface that fact and argument neither stuck to it nor made any impression upon it. It was inconceivable to her that "people of that kind" could feel about anything as the Brabants felt, but of course Ursula might, and that, she conceived, was why Ursula would not part with the lace. The duchess considered it the absurd survival in her of a faculty for the use of which she had now no longer any occasion; but seeing that she was so obstinate about it, that persuasion was of no avail, she gave it up.

"Ella Banks is a perfect Jew-girl," she began again, after a pause, inconsequently. "You would not believe how she bargained about that lace. It was a most disagreeable business."

"She is a very strong character," said Mrs. Pratt. "She interests me. And also I am afraid for her."

"Why?"

Mrs. Pratt paused to choose her words: "Have you ever seen a man look at Ella?"

"No," said the duchess; and then, on second thoughts, she added, "Ninian was there."

"Did he look at her?"

"No. At least, I don't know. He didn't say anything about her. At least, I don't remember anything. But he was very tiresome. If he had not been there I shouldn't have had to pay so much—at least, he wouldn't have had to pay so much. But that's always the way. If a man goes into a shop with you all the prices go up. And that reminds me"—she sunk her voice—"I should so like to ask. I am bothered about

something. Do you mind? But not of course to exhaust yourself."

She looked up eagerly at Mrs. Pratt, in whose grave face she detected hesitation.

"Our thoughts this afternoon have not been a good preparation," she said.

"Our thoughts!" the duchess exclaimed. "I cannot think how you know about our thoughts; not about your own, of course, about mine."

Mrs. Pratt smiled and sighed; smiled because the little lady's transparent mind was an open book to any observant person; sighed because she knew the dangers which beset natures so simple and easily imposed upon.

"Naturally I know your thoughts," she said. "You always say what you think, do you not?"

"So do you," said the duchess; "but I never know what you think."

Mrs. Pratt made no attempt to unravel this tangle. The duchess was not to be undeceived. She sat now, looking up from under the thick fringe of fluffy fair hair on her forehead with anxious expectant eyes, like, in expression, to the eyes of her own little Yorkshire terrier when he begged for a biscuit. Mrs. Pratt had risen, and was standing with the bell-rope in her hand; but she paused awhile before she pulled it, thinking deeply. She ordered the servant who answered the bell to clear the table and see to it that no one came to disturb them. When they were alone again, she opened a deep closet, and brought out a small smooth-topped table, and a heavy old-fashioned cut-glass tumbler in which was an alphabet of white ivory letters. She laid these in a circle on the table, placed two chairs, waited until the duchess was seated, then seated herself opposite. Both ladies were very serious now. Mrs. Pratt turned the tumbler upside down on the table. They bowed their heads.

"May all good influences be with us," Mrs. Pratt prayed.

"May all evil influences fly far from us," the duchess responded.

The words uttered, they each laid the tips of the fingers of one hand on the bottom of the tumbler, touching it very lightly. Almost immediately it began to move erratically, then

round and round in a circle, slowly at first, and with little pauses, but gradually quicker and quicker till at last it flew at such a rate that they had great difficulty in keeping their fingers on it. Suddenly it stopped dead, then darted off again, as if with intention, to the letters of the alphabet, the ladies scarcely touching it for fear of checking or influencing its movements. Round and round the circle of letters it flew, then it began to pause at one and another until it had spelt out three times running "Ella Banks."

"What can that mean?" the duchess asked in a whisper. "I didn't want to know about her."

"What about Ella Banks?" Mrs. Pratt asked.

The glass rapidly spelt out "Ella," "Ninian."

"What of them?" Mrs. Pratt asked.

But the glass did not move.

"Who are you?" Mrs. Pratt asked further.

Again the glass flew around the alphabet, spelling the words "Guardian angel."

"Whose?" Mrs. Pratt asked.

No answer.

"But we don't understand," the duchess protested.

Again the glass spelt, touching each letter this time with an impatient bang that pushed it out of place. "Ella Banks and Ninian." It stopped a moment, and then went on deliberately: "That is all to-day. Good-bye."

After that it stopped for good. They tried for half an hour longer, but had to give it up.

The duchess's hands dropped on her lap. "What *does* it mean?" she exclaimed, under her breath. Mrs. Pratt was silent.

The demeanour of the two ladies, who had sat throughout with grave pale faces reverently intent, speaking only in whispers as people speak for fear of disturbing a religious ceremony, bore witness to their respect for the Power they were invoking. To an onlooker only acquainted with the surface of society it would have seemed a strange pursuit for two ladies of their age, respective characters, and appearance—the one so conventional in garb and mien, the other so evidently of the great world—but it was one to which in all ages there has been a parallel, and it had become common enough in the nineteenth century, when science, religion, and superstition,

first shook hands and consulted together as to where the dividing line should be drawn between them. To the duchess and Mrs. Pratt it had evidently been no drawing-room game at which they were playing. When they gave it up, both were shaken, and had to sit for some time in silence until they had recovered themselves.

At last the duchess looked around at the clock, which stood on a bracket behind her, and began hurriedly to put on her gloves. Mrs. Pratt put the letters in the tumbler and locked up tumbler and table in the closet again. The duchess was ready to go by that time, and they left the room together.

When Mrs. Pratt returned, she threw up one of the windows, and stood at it for some time, deep in thought. Immediately below was her own flower garden. Old meadows, divided by thick hedgerows, sprinkled with giant trees, enclosed the garden. Beyond the meadows was the dark pine wood, and beyond the wood, like a streak of silver on the horizon, shone the sea. But Ursula Pratt saw neither meadows nor wood nor sea. That at which she was gazing with strained attention was not in the atmosphere of earth, but beyond, where the inner eye can see untrammelled by limits of time and space. What she saw there saddened her. When she turned from the window her face was pale, and the expression of it was both helpless and hopeless.

Adnam was standing on the hearth, but she showed no surprise on seeing him, although she had not heard him enter the room. He had been waiting quietly until she came out of her reverie. Perfect understanding as well as the deepest devotion existed between mother and son; each knew when and how to wait on the other's mood, and no jar ever ruffled the even surface of their deep affection.

Mrs. Pratt laid her hands on Adnam's shoulders, and looked up into his face. He saw that she was troubled, and, silently covering her hands with his own, clasped them. Then they kissed and separated. Mrs. Pratt walked slowly to the far end of the room and back.

"Have you seen Ella lately?" she asked.

"This afternoon," he answered. "I've just come from there. She asked me for help with her German, but she was not in the mood to-day, so I came away early."

"How is she getting on?"

"As usual—very fast with everything."

"Has there been any change in her lately that you have noticed?"

Adnam hesitated, then said: "No. At least, nothing that I could put into words."

"Then you are conscious of something——?"

Adnam looked into the fire, considering.

"The something is in myself probably," he answered at last. "You see, now that I am not playing about, every moment is precious and it takes time to give Ella lessons."

"Why not hand her over to me?" his mother asked. "I have plenty of time to teach her, and should like to have her here for several reasons."

"Thank you, mother. It is what I should have liked to suggest."

Mrs. Pratt had observed him narrowly as they talked, and was satisfied. Adnam was not in love with Ella Banks.

Twilight gathered around the little duchess, tripping along alone through the shadowy wood, 'as was her wont after a visit to Ursula. She preferred to come and go alone on these occasions. She wanted to think, she said; but she did not think. She was not capable of much consecutive thought. She felt; which is better—for a beginning. Thought is the fruit of feeling; right thinking comes of right feeling: feeling comes first; the germ of high endeavour is a pleasurable emotion—not hate therefore, which corrodes and corrupts, contracts the heart and withers the body; but love, which is to mankind what sunlight and fresh air are to the flowers, the source of all health and strength and beauty. In the little duchess feeling and thought alike were in embryo, but the germ was good. All her yearning was upwards, towards the light. We need not flatter ourselves that we are even as clever as she was, most of us. The world she lived in was very much like the dark pine wood. A path had been cleared for her through it, and she must keep to the path or lose her way. She kept to the path; while we—we try for short cuts, thinking in our self-conceit that we can make a more excellent way, and so are lost, some of us, or only saved in deep humiliation.

A shaft of light from the setting sun lay on the tree-tops,

high over head; below, the shadows deepened, and the stillness. The birds were silent and no breeze sounded among the branches; but the wood was full of voices, of low whisperings, which stopped on the slightest effort of the ear to catch them and reduce them to words, their appeal being only to that inner consciousness beyond the senses, ruled by the spirit, and by the spirit alone made comprehensible.

The little lady glanced about her, with eyes dilated, and lips parted, not smiling; smiles are the expression of the shallower feelings; our deeper delights are grave. Little shivers crisped her flesh, but they were shivers of pleasure. In psychical experiences physical fear is changed in effect; it does not detract from but adds to the strange joy of the pursuit. And the duchess had her moments. Not much of a moment this one, however, for she was hardly fully absorbed before she was brought back to her normal self and her world by the shock of a sound which the sense of hearing, held too long in suspense by the silence, was all on the alert to register—the muffled thudding of a horse's hoofs on soft turf.

The little duchess stopped startled, but she was not afraid. She had the courage of the thoroughbred. Her psychical activity, with all its delicious tremors, was suspended on the instant, and she became just a commonplace little duchess wondering who but herself could be out in the woods at that hour. She stopped and looked back to where a broad aisle crossed her own little path. Down the long aisle a horseman came galloping. Through the trees he caught a glimpse of the little lady; pulled up; and, dismounting, led his horse towards her. It was Melton returning from his ride.

"O Ninian!" she exclaimed when she recognized him, "how you startled me! You *have* been riding hard! Poor darling Platinum!"

"Good for him. Good for us both," Ninian rejoined, and drew his mother's arm through his with his disengaged hand.

She nestled up to him comfortably. "Dear old Ninian!" she said, "what should I do without you?"

"Well, you know, mother dear," he replied, "I am not your only blessing."

"True," she agreed, "but there is nobody quite like you."

"Just as well, perhaps," he muttered to himself inaudibly,

giving expression to a general sense of dissatisfaction without knowing why he should be condemning himself. He had done nothing wrong; neither did he intend to do anything wrong; but neither did he intend to do right. There is a stimulating sense of strength and mastery in the effort to steer, which is pleasurable; when a man lets himself drift his strength is sapped. He gains at best a period of dreamful ease, but sooner or later he is bound to be aroused, enfeebled by inaction, to cope with some entanglement out of which he no longer has the power to extricate himself. It was Melton's habit to drift.

The little mother looked up admiringly into the dark delicate well-bred face of her son: "Nobody like you, Ninian, dearest," she repeated—"to look at, of course I mean. For nobody could be so good as your father. I don't mean that you are not good, for you are the best son in the world. And I am sure you would never do a wrong thing. But you were naughty, you know, often, when you were a little boy, and sometimes you are tiresome now. But your dear father——"

"Perhaps he was naughty as a little boy and tiresome as a young man too—before you knew him," Ninian put in laughingly.

"Oh, no!" the duchess exclaimed—"at least, I have never known him do a thing or say a thing that I would have had otherwise. And I don't believe he has ever done a thing or said a thing that should have been otherwise."

"All men make mistakes," Ninian ventured.

The duchess caught at that: "Yes, he may have made mistakes," she said, "but that is different."

"Well, it is certainly a mistake to be naughty and tiresome," Ninian said. "I wish you would allow that my father sometimes made those mistakes. Then I might hope to grow out of mine and become in the end as good as he is."

"Oh, Ninian, you are—you will," the little lady exclaimed. "I wish I could say what I mean!"

Melton pressed her hand to his side: "Don't distress yourself, little mother," he said seriously. "I always understand you. I should like to become all that you admire and respect in a man. You must tell me my faults. When was I tiresome last?"

The question shot the little lady's mind off on to a new

tack. Ninian's last piece of tiresomeness had certainly been about the price of that lace. She had just told Ursula so. What happened next? Something puzzling—ah! she remembered—Ella Banks!

"Ninian," she burst out, stopping short, and dropping his arm; "while I think of it. Do you know Ella Banks? Have you ever spoken to her?"

His grip on the reins tightened involuntarily to a sharp jerk, which Platinum resented. Melton had to quiet the horse down before he could reply.

"Yes, of course," he said. "In your room the other day. When you bought that lace, you know."

"Of course," said the duchess. "How things do go out of one's head!"

"Why did you ask?" he said after a pause.

"Oh, well, you know, I was just thinking," she replied, making an effort to think as she spoke. "I'm not sure that I quite like Ella Banks. She is so fond of money. And she's so very clever, it seems."

"Who told you that?" Melton wanted to know.

"Ursula Pratt. She takes a great interest in Ella. And so do I. But I don't think it does for a young man——"

"Does Mrs. Pratt object to the interest Adnam takes in Ella Banks?" Melton interrupted quickly, and turned his mother's attention in a new direction, thereby missing something that might have been of advantage to himself.

"The interest Adnam takes in Ella?" the duchess repeated. "I didn't know that Adnam took any interest in Ella."

"Well, he gives her German lessons. I met him on his way to give her one this afternoon."

"Did you?" said the duchess, dropping what had been in her mind to grasp the sense she perceived in this. "Well, of course, that is different. There could be no objection to that."

"Then there is some objection to something," Melton pursued. "What is it?"

The duchess tried to recollect what she had been going to say, but the new idea was sitting down tight on the old one, and was not to be dislodged.

"It would be quite suitable, and they would make such a handsome pair," she went on; "don't you think so, Ninian?"

Of course Ursula might expect something better in the way of birth; but what real difference is there, after all, between a yeoman and a tenant farmer?"

Ninian's horse began to caper, roused to resentment again by a jerk of his tender mouth from Ninian's unsteady hand. They had reached the Castle by this time, and were only a little way from the door.

"I must find someone to take this brute—will you excuse me, mother?" he exclaimed irritably.

"Poor darling Platinum, you are naughty!" the little lady admonished the horse, and tripped off happily up the steps, her mind entirely set at rest.

"So glad I met you, Ninian dear. I've enjoyed our talk," she called back to him. He waved his hand in reply, but his countenance was sombre. The little duchess, denied a smile, blamed him in her own mind for being needlessly cross with poor Platinum. Ninian's temper always had been rather short, but he was such a dear generally, you had to forgive him this stupid little fault.

It was after this that Melton passed Eustace and Lena in the corridor, and Eustace diagnosed his symptoms as "Love," Lena as the "Hump."

CHAPTER XI

THERE was dole at Red Rose Farm one morning a few days later. A fox had broken into the hen-house, and carried off one hen, after killing a dozen. Mrs. Banks, with an apron full of dead hens, had burst in upon Ella, who was sitting in her accustomed place in the parlour window, hard at work as usual. Mrs. Banks cast the mangled carcasses on the floor in front of her.

"There!" she exclaimed, "that's what the hunt costs the poor farmer, and no compensation."

Ella glanced from her lace-pillow to the dead hens with distaste.

"Surely you will get compensation if you apply for it," she said.

"We've lost things that way before," Mrs. Banks com-

plained. "They'll make out as we're nasty folks, always grumbling whatever happens, and they'll prove as the hens was to blame. I know 'em! And if they do give anything, what'll it be? Will it be value for the eggs we shall lose? for the chickens we might have reared? for the fowls we could have sold? Not a bit of it! They'll put their own price on this lot, and a mighty mean price it'll be, I can assure you. I know 'em!"

"They pay well for their pleasures," Ella reminded her.

"Yes, to procure them," was the angry reply. "But they don't pay us well for the damage they do, with their horses and their hounds trampling our fields, and their stinking foxes growing fat on our fowls. No, it's no pleasure paying us for our losses. I'd poison every stinking fox in the countryside if I was a farmer."

"Would you mind taking those nasty things away?" Ella said, with a side-glance from her lace pillow at the horrid heap of tumbled feathers and legs and wings and hanging heads and headless bodies, all in confusion and smeared with blood. "I cannot work with them there. They make me sick."

"Oh, you're a fine lady yourself at bottom," her stepmother reproached her, as she gathered up the limp carcasses. "You are heart and soul with the lords."

"To make them pay," Ella answered significantly, looking into her stepmother's eyes as she spoke, with a glow on her purposeful face. She held the worried woman with that look for a space, then dropped her eyes, and let her go; satisfied, stimulated, as with a promise. The quietude which had provoked her stepmother at one time, inspired confidence now. She had come to realise that Ella's silences were the source of her strength and success. From her seat in the window, and with few words, she let her rule the house; but those few words, weighed and pondered, grew rich to her in wisdom. They were like gems whose value increases in proportion to their rarity. Her thoughts were diverted now to Ella's resourcefulness, in which she had full faith; and the sense of injury was healed by hope.

It is said that there is always an antidote to be found growing close to a poison. This is certainly so in life. If we looked about us with intent we should find examples every-

where. Beryl Blatchford at the Rectory might have found an antidote in Ella's determined industry to the poisonous discontent which consumed her. Sullenly dissatisfied, thinking only of herself, forced to give that grudging help which is no comfort because it is grudgingly given, incapable, for want of will, of any profitable work, Beryl made no effort to free herself from the life she loathed. She idly dreamt of being rescued, and was awaiting the event through miserable days made doubly long by her own inaction. Ella did better. She kept her heart full of affection. She worked for others and delighted in her work, so that in her quiet days there was pleasure always, the fare that beauty feeds upon, and growth of mind, best harbinger of success in any endeavour. We do well for ourselves when we labour for others.

When her stepmother left her she covered up her work and put it away in a cupboard, which she had to unlock for the purpose. It was here she stored the materials for her lace-making—thread, designs, pillows, and finished pieces. She took out a bundle of these now, and spread them out on the table; collars, squares for bodices, rounds for handkerchiefs, ends for scarves; each a work of art, though not so exquisite in texture as the diaphanous piece she had sold to the duchess. These were what she made on dark days, when the light failed her for her finer work. She examined each piece carefully now, did up the parcel again and put it away in the cupboard. Then she took out another lace-pillow, upon which was a *berthe* partly done, and, sitting in her accustomed place, worked at it with flying fingers and without a pause for the rest of the morning. It cannot be said that her thoughts flew as fast as her fingers, for she had seen her way in a moment, and troubled herself not at all about *pros* and *cons*. Thought is suspended in action, and her attention was concentrated upon what she was doing. It was her will that worked in the silence, gathering strength, and, it may be, moulding circumstances to promote her design—who knows? He who can tell us what will is can doubtless also tell us the limit of its powers.

Her father returned from the fields for his dinner with his son Richard, and Robert followed them into the kitchen. El-lery's figure of a turnip radish was disguised in a smock. There were fatigue and trouble in his round fat face.

"You've heard about the poultry?" he said to Robert.

Robert nodded. Ella, entering from the parlour just then, overheard. "That'll be all right, father," she said. "Don't worry."

Her stepmother, who was bustling about, setting the table, echoed the words.

Ellery looked from one to the other, and was about to speak, but just at that moment a dark figure blocked the light in the doorway, a workman with a bundle, and not a genuine looking workman either, but one of the nondescript breed which cannot be placed at a glance either as clerk or mechanic.

"Luke!" Ella exclaimed.

"Luke it is," he answered jauntily. "How's all here? Struck dumb, eh? Well, you might have expected me! I'm here on invitation, you know. Come, shake!" He went up to his father and held out his hand. "Shake, governor!"

Ellery shook hands mechanically. He was looking at his son as a man looks at some one he seems to know but cannot quite recall. Richard and Robert were also looking at him, and with eyes that appraised rather than approved of his appearance. The contrast between the brothers was not to Luke's advantage. Richard and Robert were big, strong, fine looking men, healthy minded as the result of healthy laborious lives. Luke was also a fair height, but lanky and ill-nourished looking, and with something unfinished, something wrong about him, something you were always wanting to put right—particularly in his head and face. It was a face that prepared you for the history of the man, a failure of a face. The nose should have been smaller, the mouth larger, the eyes further apart and steadier, the chin stronger, and the height of the narrow head reduced to make breadth. His brothers' voices were rustic but certain, the voices of single-minded, self-respecting men, without affectation, always the same; true index of their steady, reliable characters. Luke had the disagreeable trick of varying his voice according to his estimate of the person he addressed; to some he would "talk fine" in order to show himself as good as they were, to others coarsely to show his contempt. In either case the effect was unpleasant. There was hypocrisy in the affectation of refinement, and brutality in the show of contempt. He had acquired ideas on

the subject of the letter H in his absence, but his use of it was still sporadic and experimental.

The brothers shook hands. Then Luke kissed his stepmother and half-sister with loud effusive smacks. Ella furtively wiped the salute from her cheek with an immaculate pocket-handkerchief. Luke was not naturally jaunty, and, feeling that the pose had somehow failed of its effect, he moderated it. Since he entered he had had his eye on the dinner, which his stepmother was dishing up. Now he took off his hat, and threw it and his bundle aside.

"I'm dished hungry," he said, speaking with a mincing cockney twang, and eyeing a dish of smoking dumplings greedily.

"You've come at the right moment for that," his father said cordially.

He went to the table as he spoke, and the family gathered round, all standing. The others had washed their hands, and tidied themselves decently for the meal. Luke sat down as he was, unshaven, and with the dust of travel all over him. Ella looked away from him with aversion.

The mother folded her hands, Richard, Robert, and the younger children bent their heads, and Ella stood with downcast eyes, while the father earnestly pronounced the old familiar "blessing." Luke looked on with an air of superiority at this proceeding. Robert, glancing at him from under his dark brows as his stepmother said "Amen," caught the expression, and saw in it something which caused him to ruminate silently until the meal was over.

"So, governor," said Luke, when they had taken their seats, "things here just the same—static, eh?"

"What's these new-fangled words you've got?" Ellery asked. "Isn't father good enough for you? An' what's 'static'?"

"Father's too good to his little son," Luke chaunted facetiously, "and static means stuck in the mud."

"Oh, it is we that are stuck in the mud!" his father said. "I thought we was just giving you a hand up out of it!"

Robert's eyes became intent upon his plate. He had a delicate shrinking from seeing his brother shamed, but his ears were open. Luke was for the moment nonplussed, but resumed his jaunty pose to cover it.

"Mud, d'ye call it!" he said. "Well, I don't know. A man must pay for his education, and I learnt a thing or two up yonder." He indicated the direction with his head.

"What, for example?" Ella asked, dispassionately.

"I learnt that all men are born free and equal, for one thing," Luke rejoined, with a touch of truculence.

"Well," said Flipperty. "I guess the man that's born blind wouldn't agree to that."

"There is heredity, too," Ella suggested.

"Heredity be blowed!" Luke answered. "Heredity's what your blamed aristocrats stuff themselves up on. I say I'm born as good as any man."

"You come of honest people," said Ella. "Would you say that the son of a thief, hanged for murder, is your born equal?"

"Ay," said Ellery, "put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"And how can it be said that a man is born free when he is liable to hereditary propensities, as all men are?" Ella pursued.

"I say, blow heredity," Luke repeated doggedly. "A man's himself."

"You are thinking of the personal factor," Ella replied. "Of course the son of a saint may become a reprobate, and the son of a criminal may be an honest man. There are plenty of cases of both kinds on record. It seems to depend on the length of time sanctity or crime have been in the family. One black sheep does not colour the whole flock, but the taint is bound to reappear in some of his descendants. And environment counts. Still, there is the personal factor—in some of us; it is not strong in everybody; nor does it alter the case. Innate honesty gives a man a good start, innate vice must be a handicap."

"Handicap!" Luke jeered. "What do you know about handicaps? Oh, these weemin, they'll talk the hind leg off a donkey, and argeefy till all's blue."

He looked to the other men for encouragement. Their faces were unsympathetic. He turned to Ella again in search of further provocation to display his superior mind. She met his eyes with the calm indifference of one in whom no feeling of any kind has been aroused; and in the general attitude of his family there was a strong hint to him either to hold his tongue

or to adapt his conversation to the taste of the company. He did not profit by this hint. Self-conceit is death to fineness of perception; it acts on a man like blinkers, narrowing his outlook upon every subject.

"I say, every man should have his chance," he resumed dogmatically.

"That would depend, maybe, on what sort of a chance he's after," his father answered, fixing his shrewd little eyes on him with a disconcerting twinkle in them. "If he wanted a chance to steal, now? or to get drunk, or to murder a man, or——" he glanced at his daughter—"would you say he should have it?"

"I don't talk foolishness," Luke said lamely.

"Don't you!" said his father. "Well, I'm glad of that. A man who's all talk is very apt to talk foolishness"—which observation proved that Ellery had gauged his son to a nicety.

For Luke was all talk and his talk was chiefly of chances. Chances had come to him, but hitherto, unfortunately, he had always been too busy giving vent to his views to take advantage of them, and so had been left behind, still talking. Most of his views he had caught, as he might have caught the measles, haphazard, from other infected persons, and they came out badly for want of proper treatment and knowledge in the nursing. He had a general idea that the world is full of wrongs which must be righted, and no one should despise him for that; but he held also that those who did not suffer from what he felt were his own particular wrongs were to blame for them and deserved punishment—a principle as crudely barbarous in effect, if worked out to its logical conclusion, as the custom of war at the present time, which results in the many being slain incontinently to cover the incapacity, settle the disputes, and remedy the mistakes of the few.

He covered his defeat by ignoring his father's remarks and addressing himself to Robert.

"What's this job you've fetched me for?" he asked, ready to consider himself victimised whatever the answer.

"I told you when I wrote," Robert replied shortly, rising from the table, and setting his chair back against the wall as he spoke.

"Oh, yes. Three shillings a day for me, and thirty for Mr. Adnam Pratt, I suppose! Well, it's not good enough."

"Have you come here just to tell us that?" Robert asked.

"No, I haven't," Luke answered in haste, and found himself stopped short in a *cul-de-sac*.

"What were you making in London?" his father asked.

Luke's countenance lowered: "London!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you've got a job now," his father said, "and you'd better stick to it."

"I'll not stick to making money for no man as gets rich on the sweat of my brow," Luke exclaimed, shaking his fist for oratorical effect.

"Maybe you'll not be asked to stick," Robert warned him. "Adnam Pratt'll give you your due, and not a penny more—you may bet on that."

"He'll be just to me, I suppose, and generous to himself," Luke sneered. "That's their way! I know them!"

"I don't know about generous to himself," Robert rejoined. "He'll be just. That's enough for me. His brains are hiring my muscle at the market price. It's a fair deal. If I can bring some brains into the concern when I've learnt the business, I shall expect to be paid for them, too. And, what's more, Adnam Pratt is the man to pay. Now; what 'ev you to say to that?"

"I say your faith is touching. It's childlike. And I say he's taking advantage of it. He's having you somewhere and some'ow. You trust 'im! If it isn't one way it's another with the whole blamed lot on 'em. You mark my words. I know. I've been out in the world, learning the ways of the world, while you've been hocking turnips."

Robert fetched his cap. "When you've rested your mind you'll come to your job, perhaps," he said.

"I'll come when I'm ready," Luke answered in his truculent way.

"So I thought," Robert observed significantly, and left the house.

"In the meantime, Luke," said Ella looking him over, "you might be improving your appearance."

"Oh! so my appearance is not nice enough for your ladyship!" Luke sneered.

"No, it is not," Ella answered equably. "I am quite in agreement with you in one respect. I don't think the upper classes should have the monopoly of all the good things, and I would specially lay claim to a fair share of soap and water. Go and look at yourself."

Luke hesitated. The evenly uttered sarcasm alone would not have been enough to move him, but Ella's contempt was helped by her appearance. She was standing, and he saw fairly for the first time since he entered, and felt for the first time the compelling force of her personality. He would have retorted, but no retort rose to his lips. He tried the effect of a hard stare, but she turned from him with her habitual composure, when she had spoken, and returned to her work in the parlour.

"You'd best hev a wash," Richard warningly advised, and Luke slunk after him through the scullery and up the steep ladderlike stairs to the loft in the roof, where the brothers had slept together as children. The others knew that opposition to Ella was futile, but this was the first lesson on the subject that Luke had had. Its efficacy was afterwards made visible by some hitherto unaccustomed touches to his toilet which greatly enhanced his charms, but it was not in his nature to be gracious even about things that turned to his own advantage, and he made a grievance now of Ella's objection to his unkempt appearance.

"No man worn out after a rough journey can look his best," he complained; "and it's hard to have it throwed in his face."

"A man can wash his face comin' off a journey," Richard reminded him.

"And what time have I had to wash my face?" Luke indignantly demanded. "Have I had a moment to myself? Haven't I been going ever since I set foot in this house?"

"Your jaw has," Richard muttered, and then, for the sake of peace, he changed the subject. "Well, here you are again," he recommenced genially, by way of welcome.

Luke sat down on the side of one of the beds, and looked up at the bare rafters, and round the room. Since he entered the house everything had disappointed him. During the years in London, distance had magnified as well as lent enchantment

to the picture he had in his mind of the little farm, and latterly he had talked of it largely as "my father's place." To be successful the deceiver must begin by deceiving himself; and Luke was apt at this accomplishment. He was also deficient in the happy faculty which endows association with the power to please. He had not cherished affectionate recollections of any happenings of his boyhood to dignify the old, worn, familiar things by endearing them. The sight of the two big wooden bedsteads, the rickety washstand with its big tin basin, the three ugly chests which, with some clothes hung on pegs, was all that the loft contained, awakened no kindly sentiment, recalled none of those happenings which brothers, come together again after a long separation, delight to discuss—those little happenings which mellow in the warmth of a good nature and become pleasant in the retrospect. It is only in bad natures that unpleasant details survive and are recalled with bitterness. Luke saw nothing but the sordid shabbiness about him; recalled nothing of the past but its sordid shabbiness; and felt nothing now but disgust.

"Seems to have grown smaller and poorer," he grumbled after looking round.

"'Tisn't so big nor so grand as Buckin'ham Palace, I allow," Richard answered cheerily; "but you're welcome to your share on it, Luke old chap, an' I 'opes you'll strike the luck 'ere you seem to hev missed away up yonder."

"That's throwing a man's misfortunes in his face, that is!" was the ungracious rejoinder.

"That's how ye take it, is it?" said Richard, more disconcerted than annoyed. "It's the journey's made you bilious, my lad. Set it down to that, and you'll see things better. Shave yourself, and hev a good wash and brush up, and look in the glass. You'll be pretty enough then to be pleased with yourself."

Luke sat biting his nails and scowling vacantly. He took no notice of his brother's excellent advice. There was a short silence; then a clock downstairs struck two.

"That the time!" Luke exclaimed. "What's a chap to do with 'imself for the rest of the day in a beastly 'ole like this?"

"Aren't yer going to look at yer job?" Richard asked.

"Not me," Luke rejoined. "Adnam Pratt 'ud give a 'orse a rest after the journey as I've just 'ad, and expec' me to go to work. But no, thank you, not much! A man isn't a machine, an' the sooner toffs finds it out the better for them. Adnam Pratt, indeed! Why, don't I remember 'im the height of six penneth of coppers? And now he'll come lording it over me, will he? Not much, I say—an' what I says I sticks to."

Richard stood looking down at him, doing his best to make allowances, but bothered, because none that he could make either accounted for Luke or excused him.

"You're a bit bilious, that's what's the matter with you, an' it's natural an' to be expected," he said encouragingly. "It'll work off. You'll be a different man when you've cleaned yourself an' 'ad an hour's sleep. I'm going back to work. If ye're feelin' the time long an' wantin' some'ut to do fur a change later on, we'd be glad if you'd lend us a hand, father an' me."

"I suppose so!" Luke yapped. "You'd like me to slave for nothing, as you do! You don't seem to have heard that the labourer's worthy of his hire."

"I've 'eerd that," said Richard, speaking deliberately, but with rising wrath; "an' I've 'eerd honour yer father an' yer mother that yer days may be long—and I've 'eerd on a bear wi' a sore 'ead——"

"Did you ever hear of an eight hours' day?" Luke interrupted, "and time to live and to learn and to be a man instead of bein' a driven beast?"

"Yes," said Richard, scratching his head thoughtfully—"of an evenin' I've 'eerd men talk like you i' public 'ouses—low ones, brewers' 'ouses, you know—tied. I've 'eerd 'em at it in Closeminster by the hour together, wantin' time to live and learn an' be men, an' down wi' everybody but themselves. An' they'd get their arms round each other's necks, an' swear they was brothers, an' loved one another, an' take a pint or two more to prove it. Then they'd get to fighting. Yes, I've 'eerd 'em talk like you."

Richard was thinking of the general trend of Luke's observation, but he recurred now to the last particular. "'Ev I 'eerd on an eight hours' day? Yes, I 'ev—an' I've nothin' to say again that fur the man as means to spend the rest o' the

time like a man. 'Ow many on 'em would? About as many as 'ev got religion."

"Shucks!" said Luke, discomfited.

"An' I've 'eerd o' liberty," Richard proceeded, "an' liberty's the right to work as long as you please. There's as much slavery in idleness as in work if you're tied to be idle. I'm fur 'ard work myself, an' a full meal, an' my pipe an' a pint wi' other men, an' my time i' bed, an' up an' at it again, strong an' 'earty. But that's not you, I can see."

"No, it isn't," said Luke, doggedly. "I'm not a horse."

"You allus was a bit soft," Richard reflected. "If I was you, when you feel equal to it, I'd get Ella to teach you the lace-making. It's a nice soft job, an' wouldn't stop your jaw if you wanted to wag it."

The mention of Ella brought his grievance against her back to Luke's mind.

"What's come to Ella?" he demanded. "She's got to queening it nicely over you all; but she'll come none of that over me, nor no other woman."

"You'll mind your manners afore Ella," Richard said sharply. "If she queens it over us all it's because she's a right to. You'll not find Ella's match in the countryside either fur clever or good. She's just cleared us o' debt and set us goin' again wi' three hundred pounds. Wot d'ye say to that fur queenin' it?"

"Three hundred pounds!" Luke exclaimed, impressed. "How did she make it?"

"She made it wi' 'er own clever fingers an' 'er own bright wits; an' when you've done as much, you may talk! Now, I tell you, you'll jest 'old yer tongue where Ella's concerned or speak civil."

"Oh, I'm to hold my tongue or speak civil, am I!" Luke mimicked.

But Richard was clattering down the stairs as he spoke, and did not hear him.

Luke slept all the afternoon, and when he was called to tea, shouted down roughly that he didn't want no cat-lap. But the call had roused him, and, after an ineffectual attempt to sleep again, he got up, and spent a considerable time in adorning himself. The finishing touch was a bright red tie.

When at last he went down, he found Ella alone in the parlour sitting at the centre table, writing out something from a book. There were two or three other books on the table. Luke looked into one of them.

"Greek," he said.

"No, German," she answered.

"What you learning German for?"

"Have you any objection?"

"I don't see what you want to be learning that fool rubbish for."

"Why should you see?" she asked. She looked hard at him for a minute, and then she spoke, decidedly, but quietly too: "You said it was a free country at dinner. If it's a free country for men, it is a free country for women."

"Women are different——" Luke was beginning.

"I'm glad you've learnt that much," Ella interrupted. "Let me tell you a little more. Women are not only different from men; they are different from what they were. And if you want to know the difference, you had better study me. Make that your business and leave me to mind mine. You will find live and let live an excellent rule where I am concerned. We shall have to come to an understanding sooner or later, you and I—I see that—and it had better be now. Let me tell you once for all, I am going to live my life in my own way, and what you will get by interfering will not repay you for the trouble." She dipped her pen in the ink, and corrected a word in her exercise book, then looked up at him again, and waited; but it did not suit Luke to argue with her just then, and he repressed the retort that had risen to his lips.

There was resentment in Ella's heart, while she waited for Luke to speak; resentment for the ugliness that he had forced upon her, and for the still further ugliness that she anticipated in the struggle against his interference; and it was a relief to find, when he spoke again, that he had dropped the subject.

"Who's teaching you German?" he asked after a pause.

"Adnam Pratt."

"Very kind and condescending of Adnam!"

"Very kind. I don't know about condescending," Ella answered. "That's not Adnam's way——"

"With a good-looking gal," Luke interrupted. "I guess not

—and it had better not be, more especially when that gal is my sister. And he'll not come condescending over me neither if I do work for him. I'm as good as Adnam Pratt."

"I'm glad to hear it," Ella answered in that even way of hers which left her meaning obscure. Luke scented a sarcasm now, but, not being sure, let it pass, and decided to be jaunty for another purpose. With his hands in his trouser pockets, he walked to the window, and stood looking out with his back to her for a little; then he returned to the table.

"Have you half a crown, Ella?" he asked.

"I have," she said, putting down her pen.

"Lend us it. I haven't a blessed penny piece."

Ella took out her little purse, and handed him the coin: "Good-bye," she said.

"What's that for?" he asked suspiciously.

Ella smiled. She understood Luke, and it was good-bye to the half-crown she meant, but she did not say so. She had paid the price to get rid of him, and, having done so, she gave him a smile into the bargain and went on with her German.

Luke felt himself dismissed, yet he hovered about her for a while. She puzzled him, or rather it puzzled him to feel himself not the same man in her presence. There was something about her that controlled him and made him feel small and mean in spite of himself. He would like to have asserted his masculine superiority now with a parting shot before he went out, but she had damped his powder and it would not go off; and in the end he slunk away without another word, as he had slunk upstairs to wash himself, obedient to her will in spite of a strong desire to resist it.

It was a delicious spring evening, and he looked about him as he went along, but saw nothing to please him. The birds sang to him in vain, the stillness was irksome. He missed the turmoil of the London streets, the moving multitudes, the possibilities of excitement. He was on his way to the Brabant Arms, a long walk, to purchase such recreation as could be procured there for Ella's half-crown. To lord it over the yokels who had known him as a boy, and teach them a thing or two, was part of his programme; his other object was beer. He belonged to the party which does most of its business through that muddy medium.

CHAPTER XII

THE dawn in all its freshness streamed in through the wide open window of Adnam's room next morning on Adnam still asleep. He lay in the perfect abandonment of healthy sleep, one arm, from which the unbuttoned sleeve of his nightshirt had fallen back, above his head, the other stretched out on the white counterpane. His chest was bare, his head, thrown easily back on the pillow, was crowned with the brightness of his tumbled hair. The strong lean grace of adolescence was expressed in the outline of his form beneath the light bed-clothes; but even in profound sleep, with every muscle relaxed, something of character and purpose showed. With regular deep breathing, and his somewhat full, finely curved lips firmly closed, he seemed to be concentrating his attention on sleep, as he did on all his other pursuits. He slept to renew his vitality, dreamlessly, with his mind at rest; and presently when he awoke he put off sleep, as he put off the thoughts of the day when he slept, without an effort, and arose refreshed. Without haste or reluctance, he went from his warm bed to his cold bath, and afterwards dressed with his habitual care and precision. He stood for a little at the open window, enjoying deep draughts of the morning air, and looking out over the quiet fields and woods, all bathed in sunshine, to the sparkling sea. Then he went to a round table on which was spread out the plan of his garden with some few books, and all things necessary for the drawing and working out of a plan. He considered the plan for awhile, touched it here and there with a pencil, then folded it up, and took it out with him into the Orchard. There he had to face a scene of desolation and disorder, the kind of chaos out of which no fair creation seems ever likely to emerge. He faced it with his habitual gravity undisturbed by any show of emotion, setting to work at once, as if the same power that controlled the lark to sing high in the heavens above him, the blackbird to warble away in the coppice, the thrush on a dancing twig to voice its liquid measure, the brook to babble and flow, and the intermittent breeze to stir among the branches, controlled him also by the same

strength and with the same impulse to his own achievement. And when Robert and Luke Banks arrived two hours later, although he had never paused in his work from the moment he began, he was as fresh from the effort as lark, blackbird, and thrush, babbling brook and rustling breeze.

It is inevitable that the brute should growl and fight, because he is a brute. Man began abreast of the brute, and has something of the brute in him still; but the higher he rises above the brute, the finer are the weapons he obtains for his purposes, and the less recourse does he have to the primitive snarl and the use of tooth and claw. In the advanced brigade, men labour to establish right and to exterminate wrong by reason. Unfortunately for Luke he had not been recruited for the advanced brigade in London. On the contrary, he had sunk to the growling level, where might is accepted in proof of right, and the justice of a cause is recognised by the force rather than the facts by which it is argued. If his point of view were not yours he was ready to fight you. Patient study was to him the most disagreeable of all pursuits. He jumped to his conclusions on the strength of a phrase that had pleased him, and was content to have one fact for the basis of the widest generalisation. He conceived that to be successful a man must of necessity fight—be disagreeable, that is to say; he admired self-assertion and mistook the acrimony with which his associates filled up the gaps in their smatterings of knowledge for a high qualification to teach; therefore, as he was always by way of teaching somebody something that he knew very little about, he was always by way of being more or less disagreeable. If the wrongs of mankind could have been righted by invective Luke would have been a powerful reformer. He was habitually in opposition, habitually discontented, ready to snarl and fight whatever happened. That, after honesty in all things, a man's best friends in the struggle for life are a cheerful countenance and a pleasant manner, were among the many useful things which had escaped his observation in London.

The morning after his arrival, on his way to work with Robert, he chose the job by which he had been rescued from among the unemployed for the theme of his discontent, and laid down the law as to the front which it behoved a man to

show to his employer, particularly when that employer was Adnam Pratt and "a whipper-snapper." Robert had only with great difficulty got him out of bed in time for work. The amount of beer, tobacco, and oratory in which he had indulged the night before had not improved either his temper or appearance. Robert, clean and decent in his working clothes, looked the self-respecting man he was; but Luke, unshaven, with dirty boots, and the shabby genteel suit, neither workman's nor clerk's, which made it difficult to classify him, was anything but prepossessing.

"Because you work for a man and take his dirty money, he's no right to come lording it over you," he concluded a bitter tirade.

"You've a right to lord it over him, I suppose," Robert said.

"I'm as good as Adnam Pratt," Luke blustered.

"And a great deal better, eh?" Robert rejoined.

"I'll lick no man's boots," Luke asseverated, as if that office had been required of him.

"I'd certainly not advise you to lick Adnam's," Robert said. "He's all for liking a man to be a man. He'll have his due and he'll pay his due, but he'll stand no blamed nonsense, so I warn you."

"And I'll stand no blamed nonsense neither," Luke declared.

"You'll do well then, so long's you know sense from nonsense when you see it."

"And I give you fair warning," Luke went on, "if Adnam Pratt comes it white-'anded over me, and gives me the gab when I'm giving 'im the sweat of my brow, I'll teach 'im!"

"He'll come it in gloves," said Robert; "and he'll be at it himself afore you, and sweatin' inside and out, if brains sweat when they're hard at work."

Luke bounced off again at this: "I don't hold with no master as works with the men," he declared. "He's there to spy and nothing else. I'll have to have a talk with Mr. Adnam Pratt on that subject."

"Well, I warn you," Robert repeated. "Adnam Pratt'll pay respect where respect is due, and he'll 'ave the respect as is due to 'im, an' a right of it too. If you want to keep the job—and it's a good job—you'd better stow your gab if you're

equal to the effort. Adnam's not one to jaw himself. It's a word, and 'e's done with you."

Luke stepped out with the air of one who thinks himself a match for anybody and means to prove it. Having decided that it became him as a man to take the initiative with this young whipper-snapper, he swaggered up to Adnam when they reached the Orchard with a fatuous smile and a jaunty affectation of ease.

"What cheer, Adnam?" he began.

Adnam, standing with his legs apart and a measuring rod in his hand, looked at him; and rapidly, beneath his steady stare, Luke's self-assurance evaporated.

"You are Luke Banks, I suppose," Adnam said at last coldly.

"I suppose so," Luke answered, still feebly attempting to be facetious.

"Do you take the job I offer you?"

"I do, with both hands."

"Do you fully understand the terms?"

Luke looked about him, reflected, hesitated.

"You do not," Adnam proceeded. "I offer to engage you as a labourer five days and a half a week at eighteen shillings. Saturday is a half holiday."

"An eight-hours' day then, master," Luke bargained sharply.

"Twelve hours," Adnam rejoined, also sharply. "Thirteen shillings a week is the ordinary pay of a day labourer in these parts, for six days of twelve hours. I allow an hour off for dinner."

"You're giving Robert twenty-four shillings," Luke objected.

"I am, at present," Adnam rejoined.

"Why am I to be put off with eighteen then?" Luke demanded. "The labourer is worthy of his hire."

"He is," said Adnam. "I pay on that principle. I expect Robert to go up to twice twenty-four when my business is in full swing. Do you take my terms or leave them? Quick!"

Luke had it in his mind to declare that a starving man has no choice but to be imposed upon, but face to face with Adnam his self-assurance had deserted him.

"Needs must, I suppose," he muttered.

"Which is as much as to say that I am the devil driving you," Adnam took him up incisively. "You understand me, I see. Do you accept my terms?"

"I do," Luke answered. He might as well have added the curse he had on his lips, it was so evidently there.

"Get your brother a spade and set him to work on that lot, Robert," Adnam ordered, indicating a piece of ground already marked off with a chalked line. "It must be dug to-day."

When Robert had set Luke to work, he returned to Adnam, and they proceeded to measure and mark. Robert's attitude towards Adnam in their new relation was civil without being servile. Adnam had the education and the means and the ability to support his position, and Robert allowed him his right. They were employer and employed together in their work, with the good understanding between them which is born of mutual respect. Adnam had been waiting for Luke's arrival with impatience. He wanted more men, and had expected that Luke, in his unemployed experience, would have come across good men enough in similar case to recommend for the purpose. But a quick distaste for Luke himself had resulted from Luke's appearance. His offensive manner, slouching gait, and dissipated look, were only too significant, especially in contrast with the cleanly, well-disciplined strength of his reliable brother. The blight of the beer-shop was upon him, and such acquaintances as he might have would only too surely be drawn from the same tap. Robert had known of Adnam's expectations with regard to Luke, and when Adnam, after a long silence, said suddenly: "I must have men," he understood.

They both looked at Luke, who stood leaning on his spade, reflecting, an attitude into which he relapsed at frequent intervals during the day.

"London's done that chap no good," Robert observed impartially.

"There must be good men there though," Adnam reflected.

"You'd have to get a good man to find 'em," was Robert's deliberate opinion. "How many would you be wanting to get?"

"A dozen would do for a start, though a man an acre's

precious little at this stage of the business. Twenty or thirty would be the greatest economy."

"Economy?" Robert echoed doubtfully.

"Yes," said Adnam. "Ask yourself which would be the greatest saving: to have one man to do a job in fourteen days or fourteen men to do the same job in one day?"

Robert did not see it at first.

"Why, fourteen men to do it in one day, of course," Adnam proceeded. "You'd save thirteen days. Time's money, you know; very much money when gardening's in question."

Robert nodded, and went on with his work for a little, thoughtfully.

"Where'll you lodge 'em?" he asked at last.

"One Tree Cottages would hold a dozen," Adnam answered.

These were cottages on the Pointz estate. They had been let to labourers employed by the squire, who, however, having turned some of his arable land into pasturage, and requiring fewer hands in consequence, had dismissed the men, and since then the cottages had been left untenanted.

"They are in a bad state," Robert remarked, "and the squire's not flush of money even if he were willing to repair them."

"That's true," said Adnam, "but I'll see him on the subject."

Plough and harrow had already done their duty in Adnam's orchard-field, and hoe and spade and rake had now to make their punier efforts felt. The plan, clear in his own mind and on paper, was nearly as clear to the solid understanding of Robert Banks. There was no hesitation about anything that they determined to do either in the Orchard itself or in any matter that bore upon the development of the scheme. But what can two men alone, however diligent, accomplish in a short time on twelve acres? So far there was nothing to show for their labours but broken ground and weeds uprooted and left for the sun to destroy. Time was most precious, the season was rapidly advancing, summer promised to be upon them early that year, but, except for Luke Banks, Adnam had not been able to find a man to answer his purpose. He had waited while inquiries were being made for him in the neighbourhood, but inquiries were evidently futile, and at last

he determined on another expedient. Where to lodge the men when he should procure them was the first consideration. The only possible place near enough was One Tree Cottages, and after work one evening, having changed his clothes, he went to see the squire on the subject.

His road lay east away from his father's property through Pointz. The contrast between the two estates was striking. Emery Pratt's acres under Emery Pratt's vigilant care had been tilled to the highest state of productiveness. Cattle and sheep were numerous on his rich meadows, everything was forward and ready on his arable land, and everywhere the well-kept hedges and ditches bespoke incessant industry. Pratt had spent wisely. Whenever he saw that by making an improvement he could reap a profit he had spent, and had kept his household expenditure within bounds to balance the outlay. There was every comfort at Pratt's Place, but no waste and no extravagance, and, above all, no futile expenditure for purposes of display. Squire Appleton Pointz had lived on the opposite principle. False economy had been his bane. He had never known when to spend on the land, and in cutting down the expense of working his estate to the lowest figure, he had cut off all chance of profit. Where Pratt did not hesitate to lay out a pound with a view to making interest of a shilling on it, the squire had saved the pound at the moment and lost both principle and interest in the long run. He cut timber, but did not plant, let good arable fields lay themselves down in bad grass to save labour, and turned men off at a slack moment to shift for themselves as best they could elsewhere, and so ran short of hands when a few more or less made all the difference between loss and profit. At the same time he denied himself nothing in the way of expenditure which he considered necessary to keep up his social position in the county, and the consequence was an encumbered estate, with incessant anxiety about ways and means harassing him, injuring his health, making life a grievous burden instead of a pleasant interval between the two eternities, as it should have been.

Adnam looked about him as he went, closely observant. To the eye of the artist the sun, low down in the west, gave the last touch of beauty to the quiet land; but, as to the eye of the physician who knows that some much admired beauty is

not the beauty of health but the symptom of a deadly disease, so to the eye of the modern agriculturist those peaceful pastures on either hand, sparsely sprinkled with cattle, were symptomatic of the threatened decay of a great nation, a danger signal not to be ignored for a moment if the situation were to be saved. From the brow of the hill Adnam looked about him, and saw good ground on every hand gone out of cultivation which, within his father's recollection, had been bearing heavy crops. Corn land had been laid down in grass, or, worse still, had been left to lay itself down without the seeds of cultivated plants. There were acres and acres of permanent grass, useless for mowing and of very little value for grazing, which, by the application of modern knowledge could have been made to yield bountiful harvests. The fields looked lovely by the waning light in their vivid green, but it was not their loveliness that appealed to Adnam's intelligence. What he noticed was the neglect that had fallen upon them and the barrenness which was the result of neglect. The loneliness also struck him. Not a human being was there anywhere in sight except himself.

Adnam had to pass the little row of three cottages which he wanted for his men and went in to inspect them. The great tree from which they took their name, stood up, gaunt and bare, at the end of the row, with two long branches, like arms, outstretched, imploring pity. There were little gardens in front of each cottage, once bright with flowers and sweet herbs, and longer strips for vegetables at the back, now all foul with weeds, a wild riot of weeds, dock and nettle and thistle, dead weeds of past seasons spreading dank odours of decay, with shoots of the coming crop just appearing, and sinister enough in suggestiveness even in the first unfolding of their tender leaves. The windows of the cottages were broken; one shutter hung on a single hinge, and all of them were left to the wind for playthings, to be flapped and rattled and banged when it raged, or swung to and fro gently, with monotonous creakings, as if each little breeze as it passed pulled them aside to peep in at the windows, and, shocked by the desolation within, cautiously pushed them to again and stole away sorrowing. Spouts and water-butts and sheltering palings were rotting to bits, and the once warm thatch on the roofs had been turned by summer rain

and the melting of winter snows to a loathsome, evil-smelling pulp. Adnam, with the aptitude for association which accompanies senses keenly acute, suffered and sickened at the sight. He could just remember these cottages, with a family in each, bright and cheerful and homelike, bearing witness, in their decent cleanliness and in the order that surrounded them, to healthy lives, well lived and happily. He was too young and too self-centred as yet to think of the men, women, and children who had been turned out of them to shift for themselves in city slums, where men, women, and children starve and rot, and give off of the stagnation to which the hopeless condition of their lives for the most part condemns them, the foulest effluvia of humanity, dirt, disorder, disease, crime, and death. Had he had the experience he might have thought of Robert Banks, an honest, industrious, capable man. Here he was in a neighbourhood which was rich even in its half-cultivated state, an intelligent agriculturist with his heart in the work, and what was his prospect? He was confronted with the choice of barren bachelorhood and the third of a rafted room in his father's house, or he might take his chance of being able to support a wife and family by precarious work in a town; work for which he was not fitted, and must in any case wrest from other men. Probably he would find himself condemned to surroundings where men swarmed like maggots in cheese, with the horrible stench of the crowd in their nostrils, their vitality sapped by the vitiated air, their flesh wasting for want of proper nourishment, and even the best of them driven by exhaustion to find fictitious strength to continue the struggle in the fatal poison of the public-house. Adnam might have thought in this strain had he known enough. But he did not know enough. He could feel, however, if he would not think, and that, after all, is the important thing. The mind is fertilised by feeling, emotion being the mainspring of action; what we think is of no avail when thought is not fired by feeling. Adnam hurried away from the desolate ruins, but their putrid stench remained in his nostrils, and the depressing effect on his spirits, as he went.

The squire was a man of regular habits. He was just going to dress for dinner when Adnam asked for him. He was

impatient of the delay, but for Pratt's sake he consented to see Pratt's son. Pratt was a worthy old fellow, and it would be well if his sons were half as decent, though that was hardly to be expected in these degenerate times, when the respectable yeomanry were being replaced by a generation of pseudo gentlemen without the breeding of the class they aped or, one substantial quality of the class they had deserted—so the squire, a prey to irritation, reflected, when Adnam's name was brought to him.

Squire Appleton Pointz had been sent to a public school, and had spent long years on the grammars of dead languages without acquiring a taste for them—and on games, and the practice of pretty manners; both good things and to be encouraged, the games for the development of physique and for the discipline of fair play, and the pretty manners for the maintenance of the refinements and the amenities of polite life. But the rest of his education had tended to stay his development in every direction. He believed society to be safe only so long as it was static, and held the very word progress in detestation. Of any change proposed he anticipated nothing but a change for the worse. He hugged to his heart the opinions and prejudices of his ancestors, and pursued their primitive methods in the face not only of argument but of every fact that could be produced to prove to demonstration that such opinions rested on false premises, and that such methods, having had their day, were due to be superseded. At the public school he had not learned anything that could be of use to him in the management of his property, or in the conduct and business of life generally. Practically he was no further advanced than his great-grandfather, one of a school of politicians with no concern for anything beyond their own interests, and no clear grasp of anything that would best make for their interests. If it could have dawned upon him that he and his class were being left behind, he would not have understood that this was because change is inevitable. There are only two kinds of change, change for the better and change for the worse, and the class which does not labour to influence change that it may be for the better must inevitably find itself exposed to a change for the worse. He was, in fact, a staunch unprogressive Conservative, a man, that is to say, who walks

backwards with his eyes fixed on the past. He considered that the days when a man could convince the country of his ability to manage its affairs by the apt quotation of a Latin tag, were great days; and he could always quote Latin himself, quite nicely; but he could not have given you a good idea on the subject of catch crops to save his life.

He was a small, thin, ill-nourished man, with complaint in his cultivated voice, dissatisfaction in his cramped mind, and a heart and soul which had suffered from malnutrition like his body, and were early arrested in their growth.

Adnam was shown into the library, where he was immediately joined by the squire, who came hurrying in after him, expressing his irritation at being disturbed by movements of his fingers. He took up his position in front of a large writing-table which stood out in the room alone as if the rest of the furniture shunned its acquaintance. He did not ask Adnam to sit down, but his greeting was tolerably genial. As they talked, however, the geniality gave place to a mixture of severity and suspicion, the outcome of inward reflections on the degeneracy of the age, following in natural sequence upon the irritability caused by Adnam's untimely visit. The squire suffered chronically from the obstinate intolerance and positiveness which, in men of his constitution, are more often indicative of nerve poisoning than of stupidity or a bad heart.

"Well, Pratt," he said, "you want to see me? Why, what a big fellow you've grown! You're a man already! How the time does fly, to be sure! You are Adnam, are you not? Not the same breed as your half-brother. I remember his mother. . . . Well, what do you want?"

"I want One Tree Cottages," Adnam answered with his usual directness, which was startling to the squire. "I came to ask you. If you are not going to use them yourself, sir, will you put them in repair and let them to me?"

"Use them myself!" the squire exclaimed, with something like a squeal in his thin voice, and forgetting that he had emptied them himself; "why, where am I to find men to put in them? There was hardly a man to be had last harvest for love or money."

"No," said Adnam; "it doesn't pay them to come back for an odd job."

"And what's this job of yours? What do you want men for, eh? Are you going to find them a permanent job?" The thin voice sharpened with derision.

"My father has given me twelve acres to cultivate."

"And how many men do you propose to employ on twelve acres?"

"Probably twelve permanently," Adnam answered; "but, to begin with, as many as I can get, up to twenty or thirty."

The squire stared at him: "What the devil are you going to do with twelve men on twelve acres permanently, and as many as you can get up to twenty or thirty to begin with?" he demanded. "What are you going to set them to play at?"

"To prepare the ground first for intensive culture—*Culture Maraîchère*," Adnam answered imperturbably. "I am afraid I am under-estimating the number of men I shall want, but I can get more as I go on. I am only feeling my way."

The squire's strength failed him at this. He puffed out his breath and sat down. Adnam stood, quietly waiting, until he recovered himself.

"It's your foreign blood, I suppose," the squire at last assumed. "Makes you believe that you can introduce foreign fashions into English industry, eh? If you think you can get as much out of the ground here as they do in France, you'll have a sad awakening from your illusion. The soil's different, the climate's different, and you'll find the workmen damned different too."

"Intensive culture is not dependent upon climate to any great extent," Adnam answered. "The ground can be heated with stable manure, and there is always glass. Heating pipes give the same results as fermenting manures, and at a much smaller expense of human labour. And, anyway, the climate and soil here in the south are much better than the climate and soil of many places where the best results have been obtained, as in the environs of Paris, for instance. A man can make his own soil, as men have done in the peat-bogs of Ireland, on the sand-dunes of the northern coast of France, and on the rocky slopes of the Rhine." Adnam warmed to the subject as he quoted his authorities. "Besides, so far as climate is concerned, there is no fear here, where the cottagers can raise potatoes as early as the first-half of May in good

years. This climate is better than the climate of Jersey in the spring and early summer. The soil will have to be made, of course—it always has to be made for market-gardening; but that will be no great business where it is naturally so fertile. With proper cultivation it will soon teem. My English blood makes me confident of success.”

“All theory, my lad,” said the squire, “all theory. The experiment’s never been tried.” Adnam was about to correct him but refrained; the squire would only have contradicted him. “And,” he went on, “I’ll not help your father’s son to waste his money in trying it. Permanent pasture’s the only thing for hereabouts, where men are not to be had. I should know. I have had to turn hundreds of acres of arable land into permanent pasture because it did not pay to cultivate them, thanks to those Radical scoundrels.”

Adnam, in his mind’s eye, saw those permanent pastures with grass and thistles in profusion, and he thought of the abandoned cottages and orchards going to ruin, and the labour of the generations which had cleared away the stones and fenced and rough-drained the fields; labour lost for lack of enterprise by their descendants, who had sacrificed pounds of profit to save pennies of expenditure by giving the peasants no option but to go and leave the deserted land to do what it could for itself with crops of weeds, suitable symbol of the owner’s apathy.

“No, young man,” the squire pursued, “you’re not going to teach us agriculture in England. We know what we know, and it’s no use trying it on here with new-fangled foreign notions. Agriculture has been ruined in England by these accursed Radical rascals. Your father’s not been bitten by this tick you’ve got into your head, I’m sure; he’s too sensible a man for that?”

There was doubt expressed in the query, but Adnam held his peace. As a matter of fact, his father had been bitten for his good and had proved it in some old lay fields, long given over to mushrooms, but of late yielding heavy crops as the result of new-fangled ideas.

“And how would you pack twelve families into three cottages, pray?” the squire inquired.

“Twelve men, not twelve families,” Adnam corrected.

The squire grunted: "Anyway, I shall not do it," he said. "I shall not encourage you to waste money. I have too much respect for your father. I suppose it's his money you are throwing away?"

Adnam felt that this, not being the squire's business, was an impertinence, and ignored the question.

"Will you let me make the cottages habitable myself?" he persisted. "I won't even ask you to take a percentage off the rent for the money I expend on them."

But the squire had set himself in opposition, and, once set that way, not even his own obvious interest could move him: "No, I won't," he answered shortly.

"The cottages are an eyesore," Adnam ventured.

"They are," the squire agreed. "I'll have them pulled down and cleared away."

A merry confident voice broke in here, and, from behind the writing-table, a head of tawny hair and two bright dark eyes appeared. It looked as if the head were cut off, and had been set on the table.

"Well, you are grumpy!" said the voice.

Both men started.

"What the dev—" the squire began. "What are you doing there, Lena?"

At the same moment, Adnam recognized the young lady with whom he had had the encounter in the wood. He flushed uncomfortably.

"Sitting on the floor, reading Aristotle," she answered the squire, with the confidence of extreme impertinence; "at least, that is what I was doing until your most instructive conversation began to interest me. Since then I've been listening, to improve my mind."

"What brought you here?" said the squire sharply.

"Oh, what brought me?" she answered deliberately, rising as she spoke, and coming round to the front of the table where she stood, propping herself up against it with her feet stretched out before her; "well, if you must know, I came here for protection from an enemy of the female persuasion whom you harbour here."

"What do you mean?" the squire demanded.

"Who, not *what*," she said. "I mean your delectable son,

Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz. I warned him I should tell if he tried it on again. The trouble with him is that he's too conceited to believe that I have no wish to kiss him. I hate telling, but with a man like that"—she threw up her head—"it's a duty. It'll make the house safer for other young girls to stay in."

The squire knitted his brows angrily while she was speaking, and glared at her.

"I see you understand me," she added coolly; "but we can settle that business afterwards. What I want to know now is, why are you so grumpy with Adnam?"

"You seem to be on intimate terms with Mr. Adnam Pratt," the squire said ironically.

"I am," she replied; "but he's not on intimate terms with me yet. He's too young——"

"You're talking nonsense," the squire interrupted.

"I do sometimes," she acknowledged. "But look here, Adnam, you go to my father, Colonel Kedlock, you know, the duke's agent. There's lots of room to build cottages at Castlefield. You go to my father, and tell him I sent you. The duke will be all right. The ruin of the agricultural industry makes no difference to him. Landed property is his plaything. He gets his money from ground-rents somewhere, and spends it like a gentleman—when anybody tells him how to spend it."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I don't spend my money like a gentleman?" the squire inquired, evidently nettled.

"I've noticed that the answer to 'Do you mean to insinuate?' is always 'I don't mean to insinuate anything,'" she rejoined; "but you won't expect me to say that. You know I never, if I can help it, say anything that everybody else says."

"Then you do insinuate that I don't spend my money like a gentleman," he decided.

"How is it possible to insinuate that you spend money at all when you are always telling us that you have no money to spend?" she asked, with an impudent grin.

There was something very taking about that grin, however, and the squire's frown relaxed under its influence. In another moment he would have been smiling in response, and Adnam might have had the cottages after all; but, unfortunately, just

then, a deep voice called from the hall: "Appleton! Appleton!"

"There's auntie!" Lena exclaimed, clapping her hands, as if she were chasing chickens from the room: "Shu, nunc! bolt!"

The squire sprang up, knocked over his chair, entangled his feet in the wastepaper basket and upset a pile of papers, before he got clear away.

Lena, with her arms akimbo, and her whole body convulsed with laughter, appealed to Adnam: "Wasn't that a performance? I never knew what it meant to go like a shot until I saw Uncle Appleton bolt when auntie calls him. And he does it every time," she added, as if that put the finishing touch to the absurdity. She wiped her eyes that mischief might see out of them the better, and got between Adnam and the door, talking the while.

"He's a distant cousin of mine—they're not really my aunt and uncle," she said, "but I've known them three months, and I call them so to save ceremony. You may have noticed that I don't stand upon ceremony."

"I have had occasion to notice that," Adnam answered pointedly.

"I'm staying here for a week," she pursued, "to give the little duchess a rest. She worries about me—dear Good Gracious. She's a good sort, the little duchess, don't you think so?"

"I am not in a position to think of the duchess in such terms," Adnam answered stiffly.

"Do you know, when you're huffy you speak foreign English with an accent," Lena observed, with her fascinating smile. "You get that from your mother, I suppose. You're all right on her side, anyway," she added encouragingly.

"Which is as much as to say that my father is not all right, as you elegantly express it," he said.

"Don't be huffy, dear, please," she entreated. "Of course your father is all right. Everybody says so. In a different way, of course."

"In some sort of inferior way, I suppose."

"Now, Adnam—really!" she remonstrated. "Well, anyway, let me tell you, between ourselves. If I could say as

much for my father, it's a proud girl I'd be. But I can't. I like the old boy, you know, but——"

"Need we discuss Colonel Kedlock?" Adnam hastily interrupted.

Lena looked at him admiringly: "That's good," she said. "Breeding shows. Now that brute, Algernon——!"

"Was that true?" Adnam asked, curiosity getting the better of discretion.

"Gospel true."

"And you objected?"

"That surprises you?"

"It is so very different from my own experience."

She enjoyed this, and laughed at the reminiscence.

"Yes, I objected," she went on. "He's a fawning deceitful beast. I spat at him. And that's what I'm always going to do in such cases. Adnam," she broke off, "do you know what has happened? You are talking to me! *Château qui parle va se rendre.*"

"Not in the way you mean," he said, standing on guard. "Will you let me pass, please? I must go."

She spread out her arms to stop him: "You know, dear sir," she said, "you're rather a muff at present;" she advanced as she spoke, he retreated. "You might, since you object, adopt my kissing principles, and threaten to spit," she suggested.

"Impossible," he rejoined. "Whatever my position is, my principles are the principles of a gentleman——"

"Which forbid you to be vulgar and rude like me?" she interrupted. "Good! I like that too. And you act up to your principles? Better still. You shall always be my friend, Adnam. But look here, friend, your principles are elastic, you know. You called me a hussy the first time you saw me, which was distinctly vulgar and rude."

"I know I did—under great provocation," Adnam answered. "The principles of a gentleman are not proof against every sort of attack."

"Your principles make me want to kiss you more than ever," she said. "You do look nice! I wish I could marry you, but I can't, you see. I have to marry Eustace Brabant. He doesn't know of the happiness in store for him yet. I

haven't told him. He has to get on in the army, and his head is so small, there would be no room in it both for me and the Queen's Regulations. Eustace is a dear, just the thing for a husband, and always nice to kiss as a duty; but for kissing as a treat, Adnam, dear, I choose you."

She made for him as she spoke, and Adnam, surprised out of all dignity, ran round the table, she after him, and escaped into the hall, and out of the front door, which fortunately stood open. As he hurried down the drive, he heard a ripple of hearty laughter, like the laughter of a happy child, and crushed his hat down on his head, and almost broke into a run. But he did not look round, nor did he feel safe from pursuit until he had reached home, and shut himself up in his own room.

Scandalous, that was what he called it—yet he smiled; and, for the time being, it was not upon his interview with the squire that Adnam reflected.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. PRATT sat at one of the windows of her sitting-room late in the evening, thinking. The season was advancing. The air was sweet and fresh with the sweetness and freshness of the coming summer. The spring flowers in the garden below were in full bloom, a rhapsody of colour; and, that the harmony of nature in her pleasantest mood might be all fulfilled, birds, resting from the happy labours of the day, broke the intervals of silence with happy songs. Near by, a thrush, full-throated, saluted the setting sun with incessant praise. Further afield, the intermittent warble of a blackbird made melody in the afterglow. And as the hush of the gathering twilight deepened, there rang out the ecstatic note of a nightingale in amorous rapture, early at the tryst, awaiting his love. This old earth of ours in such places and at such times is a dangerous rival to heaven and Ursula Pratt felt it so. The potent spell of its transient joys was laid upon her, taking her unawares, and bringing her down to the level of her senses with expanded heart from that higher spiritual plane where the soul is uplifted, and those who attain to it cease to trouble because they understand.

But the grip of the senses is of short duration, and when they loose their hold thought returns. Ordinarily Ursula did not rely upon thought, dry thought, which only puzzles and perplexes. She knew the power of the passive mind to receive impressions, and her habit was to make no effort to think her way to a conclusion. Such effort merely results as a rule in a more or less turgid stream of recollection, a jumble of facts, for the most part inaccurately observed, and of suppositions wrongly deduced from them. Material knowledge without spiritual enlightenment is a slippery path on a dark night. The wisdom that avails to help us flows from a source beyond thought into the mind that is open to receive it. Quiescence is essential to produce a perfect state of receptivity. The intellect is for ever recording the happenings within its limited range; it brings to the mind the fuel necessary to maintain its activity, and mental activity is a fine instrument which does good work but circumscribed. Its perceptions are finite; the infinite is beyond them, but not beyond reach. When the mystic has soothed his busy intellect to repose—with a refrain of words, perhaps—the barrier is lowered, and he finds himself released from the hampering conditions of time and space, in a state of prescience, seeing and foreseeing. The things we think—or work out for ourselves with the help of our intellectual machinery—are apt to mislead, as many a discredited system of philosophy, many a doctor's mistaken diagnosis, many a plausible theory that would not work, and confident forecast of results that did not supervene, might be quoted to prove; but there can be no mistake made about that which is revealed when the inner eye is open. Ursula Pratt knew well how to divest her perceptions of hampering encumbrances, but this evening the will was wanting. The beauty of the day's decline held her senses enthralled, and the influence of the earth was upon her. Before she knew it she was thinking. She was down in the world of conjecture where sin and disease are not recognised as temporary disturbances in the process of evolution, but are regarded as permanent constituents of our mortal state, from which it is our dream to be forever striving to escape, without success. She found herself forced to think, and, in a moment, life with its doubts and its fears, its weariness, its incompleteness; its sorrows, injustices, cruelties; its few and

imperfect pleasures; its many and terrible pains—oppressed her; this life of uncertainty and dread in exchange for that other happy state from which she had descended, exiled by thought.

The duchess had been with her that afternoon, the little duchess—"Good Gracious!"—who did not talk about the simple life because nobody did at that time, but loved it and lived it when she could. She had come to Ursula in an uneasy state of mind, and had gone again, strengthened and comforted, leaving her forebodings behind her. Ella Banks was one of her troubles, a vague one, but recurrent, and all the more tormenting for being vague. Mrs. Pratt also was concerned about Ella, but in a different way. At the bottom of the duchess's undefined feeling there was fear for herself; Mrs. Pratt feared for the girl. She had taught her regularly since she took over the task from Adnam, and was finding her deeply interesting in many ways. Her unusual strength of character and outlook, combined with her keenness to learn, her great ability and determination, and her rare personal attractions, might portend so much, and such very different things. Mrs. Pratt detected in her a mind made up, though without the experience and with very little of the knowledge generally believed to be essential. She was purposeful, that was evident; but what was her purpose—the main one? That was the puzzle. Her minor purposes she discussed openly, but Mrs. Pratt always felt that these, though enough in themselves for most women's lives, were in Ella's case but component parts of some great whole. Mrs. Pratt merely smiled at the duchess's hints about Ella and Adnam. She did not even recognise Ella as one of the casual influences that would bear upon his career. The two made no secret of their affection for each other. They were intimate good friends, and would remain so; but that was all. Mrs. Pratt held the map of Adnam's life spread out before her mind's eye, and found little trace of Ella upon it in relation to him. She was a part of the social system in which he had his being; nothing more.

From the little dot that was Ella upon this map, Mrs. Pratt's attention wandered off over the whole neighbourhood in its relation to Adnam's enterprise. She was questioning the social conditions, seeking to determine the extent to which

she feared they might be hostile to him as an innovator—when Adnam himself broke in upon her reflections. With him and the opening of the door there came a current of air that chilled her. She rose from her seat in the window, and went to her usual place beside the hearth.

"Shut out the cold grey evening," she said. "How suddenly it has changed! Just now it was so warm and bright." She glanced at an old-fashioned clock which stood on a bracket on the wall opposite to her. "Ah, no, I am mistaken," she corrected herself. "The evening has had plenty of time to change since I last felt that it was warm and bright. Light the lamp, Adnam, dear son. You are late. What have you been doing?"

"I went to see the squire," he said, answering her as he moved about the room, closing the windows, drawing the curtains, and lighting the lamp. "He refuses to let me have the cottages. Says he has too much respect for my father to encourage me to waste his money. Supposes that it is his money that I am wasting. He seems to think me a desperate character."

Mrs. Pratt, sitting in her high-backed abbess chair, with her slender hands resting on the arms, silently watched him as he moved about the room. When he had lighted the lamp he sat down on the other side of the hearth.

"And your work," she said; "how is it getting on?"

"It is not getting on at all," he replied. "I must have men. Robert Banks is a capital fellow, but Luke is a slouch. He got amongst a bad lot of the unemployed in London, and now he's all talk. He shirks what he can of his work all day, and spends his nights at the Brabant Arms, holding forth on the subject of his wrongs and what should be done to right them. I must get rid of him."

"It is hard on his people," Mrs. Pratt observed.

"His people are as much out of patience with him as I am," Adnam rejoined. "He's had his chance and he's not taken it. My Orchard is not a charitable institution. I shall deal fairly by my men, and they must deal fairly by me, or go. Filling a good man's place with an idle, conceited lout isn't my idea of justice."

"It is difficult now to get good men," Mrs. Pratt said

thoughtfully. "There has been a great change in that respect on this countryside even in my time. And it was such splendid material, your English peasants—willing, nay anxious, to respect their superiors. It was short-sighted policy to drive them off the land when so little would have kept them on it. You'll have to pay high in kind to bring them back, and they'll be of a different stamp. It was good devoted servants your supine gentry let go; those that replace them will be arrogant masters. They will not forget the times when men were starving in idleness, and hardly a rood was to be had of the seventeen million acres of land which were lying untilled in the kingdom."

"The peasants are a dull lot," said Adnam.

"Those that are left, yes," his mother replied; "and no wonder when it has been your ruinous policy for so long to deprive good men of every inducement to stay in the country while offering them at the same time the means, and even persuading them, to emigrate. Those that are left are like the landowners, without enterprise, living for themselves from day to day, too shortsighted to see society as a corporate body, for the benefit of which each individual member must work if it is to prosper and be kept in health."

"In the book of 'The Wisdom of Ages' it is written: 'Every man for himself,'" Adnam reminded her.

"Yes," she answered smiling, "and therein it is also said that 'union is strength!'"

"Then 'The Book of Wisdom' contradicts itself," Adnam declared.

"Never," his mother said, "if you read it aright. You must take the two axioms together. Men are doing the best for themselves when they add to their own puny strength by uniting."

"But the saying finishes with 'God for us all,'" Adnam objected.

"That is the proof of what I say," she replied. "'Every man for himself, and God for us all,' men say, without perceiving that, according to the *dictum*, God sees solidarity where they uphold a petty individualism. The great sum of sin and suffering will never be lessened until men and women see themselves in the scheme of life as part of a whole. Co-operation is the watchword of the future."

"I believe you are talking Socialism, mother," Adnam said laughingly.

"Not bureaucratic Socialism, then," she answered with a smile. "Bureaux mean officialdom, and officialdom is anti-human."

"I should hate to lose my individuality," Adnam declared.

"No need to," she answered. "The more workers there are for the community at large, the less will there be for each individual to do, and the more leisure for him to be himself."

There was a pause, and then Adnam rose impatiently, and, standing with his back to the fireplace, exclaimed: "I must have men. I must have twenty or thirty, at least."

"So many!" Mrs. Pratt ejaculated.

"It is not a drawing-room game I am playing in the Orchard," he answered. "I cannot afford to dawdle, and I am losing precious time for want of hands every day. I am going to Closeminster to-morrow to see if there are men to be had there. If not, I must go to London, and if I can't find what I want among the unemployed there, I shall go to France. In fact, I believe it would be the better plan to go there at once. I should get men there who know the work."

Mrs. Pratt looked up at him with the curiosity of the mother who never quite gets over her first surprise when she finds that her child can run alone. But there was more excuse for surprise than usual in her case, for Adnam had bounded from youth to maturity without any change in his appearance to correspond with the sudden, or seemingly sudden, development of character. This was the surprise to his mother. Early adolescence was all that showed as yet in his fine young face. As he stood there at ease, speaking with his habitual deliberation, he might have been a sixth-form boy discussing the chances of the weather for a cricket match in which he took no particular interest. But it was in that same deliberation that his strength lay. There is no weight in the quick speech of your wordy man; he takes no time himself to make sure that he means what he says, and gives no time to others to be impressed. The man who commands is monosyllabic.

"If you desire to have Frenchmen, must you go to France yourself?" Mrs. Pratt asked presently.

"Yes, I think so," he replied. "I could write, of course. I am already in correspondence with some of the principal cultivators about Paris, but I prefer to go myself. I must choose my men. I'll have no more weeds if I can help it. I took Luke for granted. I shouldn't have taken him at all if I had seen him."

"Have you spoken to your father?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said 'Well, well!' and laughed." Adnam smiled himself at the recollection of that good gigantic laugh, and his mother, well imagining it, smiled too.

"Your father is very good to you," she said.

"He shall not be disappointed in me, mother," Adnam assured her, "not if it is in me to give him his due."

She rose, her black draperies falling about her slender graceful figure to the floor, and stood with her hands on his shoulders looking into his face for a moment, then kissed him on both cheeks and sighed. He returned her kisses with a boy's perfunctoriness, and asked her why she sighed. She moved away from him.

"I am thinking, Adnam," she answered. "I am oppressed with thought to-night." She walked the length of the room slowly, and returned to him.

"I am greedy, my son," she said. "I am very greedy. I am greedy for you, that you should be happy. Happiness is put within our reach on the one condition, that we share it. All that we have we must give again; we must pass it on to others or we lose it. I am greedy for everybody, that they should have some ease and beauty in their lives. There is nothing so curative as pleasure, and it is in honest affection that we find the purest pleasure on earth—the larger love that makes for human fellowship. Intellectual people rely on their brains too much; they let their hearts contract; and head without heart is light without warmth. You will be successful, my son. I pray that you may be happy."

"Then I shall be happy," Adnam answered. "When I have made my fortune, I will do all the good I can in the world with it, I promise you."

"You should be doing all the good you can in the world

as you go along," she said. "There will be your men; what are you going to do for them?"

"As I said," Adnam replied: "treat them fairly."

"What is fairly?"

"I shall give them good wages for good work," he said.

"Is that all, Adnam? Shall you have no free gift for them? You who have had so much added to your life by education and environment, which they will never have had to enjoy——"

She waited, but Adnam only looked at her as a child looks when it is puzzled by a question which it does not understand. She walked away from him again slowly, and slowly returned.

"Tell me what you mean exactly," he said.

"I wish I could!" she replied. "You are striking out boldly in a new direction for yourself. Ah! that is it! That is what makes me afraid. It is all for yourself. I don't mean literally. You will always give liberally. You would give all you have to those you care for, but that is not enough."

"It is a good deal," said Adnam ruefully.

"That kind of giving is for your own gain," his mother explained. "You give jewels to your wife, and it is a joy to see her wear them; how many people are the better for that? A case of extreme poverty and hardship is brought to your notice, and you relieve it, and relieve yourself at the same time of the discomfort it causes you to hear of the poor person's sufferings; but what have you done to prevent a repetition of the same sort of suffering in thousands of other cases?"

"If everybody who could relieved one case?" Adnam suggested.

"It would not remove the cause," she answered, "and while the cause continues the same troubles must recur. You provide for the degenerate, what do you do to prevent the degenerate ever being born? You subscribe to numerous charities without inquiring how those charities work, what the net result is, and if a better result could not be arrived at by other means. I give you the emigration societies for example. This country is being drained of its best men by your emigration societies. Surely the better plan would be to develop your own land and keep the men at home. It is the system, you see, that is defective. The maxim most approved is every man for himself. The individualist is the solitary savage of society, in-

capable of realising that what is best for the community as a whole would work out best for each individual in the long run. What does it all go for, your giving, and the giving of hundreds of thousands of other generous people? Does the sum of sin and suffering grow less? It does not. There is misery in every grade of society; the mental sufferings of the idle neurotic rich, if anything, outbalances the physical sufferings of the toiling poor. And under the present system there will be no relief. This old conservative country is a slave to precedent of all kinds, good and bad. It knows the sores of its own society and is ashamed of them, but it does not treat them constitutionally, the only radical method of treatment; it treats them locally, covers them up with various soothing salves, denies their existence when it can, and, when it cannot, describes them as incurable and preaches resignation."

"But what is to be done?" said Adnam.

"Distrust precedent. Experiment—and beware of conservatism. Conservatism is the canker of society. Politically and socially conservatism is the governing principle which has enabled a small number to secure the best of everything for themselves at the expense of a great suffering multitude; it is used to persuade the many to labour and pay for the ease and idleness of the few."

"But—" said Adnam, and hesitated.

"You were going to say your father is a Conservative?" she questioned. "He calls himself so. But he is a Progressive Conservative who upholds all that is best in Liberalism. For what, broadly speaking, is the distinction? Conservatism stands for old ideas of the rights of property; Liberalism stands for new ideas of the rights of mankind. Your father is always on the side of the oppressed. But I hope," she broke off, "that you will never get into the mire of party politics."

"What would you have then?" Adnam asked.

"A man should give more than mere money and money's worth here and there," she answered; "he should give his services, himself, to the community at large. What the world requires is men and women of the world to work in the world for the good of the world—the whole world. Men should give up tinkering in isolated groups at effects; they should attack causes boldly. They should see humanity as a solid body, the

health and disease of which depends on the health or disease of each individual member.—I have depressed you, Adnam," she broke off.

"No, you have only made me think," he replied.

"That is enough," she said, smiling. "It is getting late. You will make an early start to-morrow in search of men?"

"Yes—and I shall think of all the good ones who might have been here to help me, the Bankses and the Rycrofts and the Gills and the Parks—if only you had been the duke and the squire, and the parson in the pulpit, and all the large farmers round about!"

He kissed her good-night, and left her laughing.

Young people do not like lessons, and Adnam had listened to his mother with more respect than interest. He only half understood what she was driving at, yet her ideas sank in. He had no use for them then, that he knew of, and never expected to have. In his scheme of life, as he saw it just then, her teaching had no more part to play than those other items of his education which included the unforgettable knowledge of the fact that William the Conqueror landed in 1066. Before he reached his room, his mind was busy arranging the order of his doings for next day; and his head was no sooner on the pillow than he was fast asleep—the blissful sleep of youth in perfect health of body and mind, into which no disturbing dreams intruded to rouse him even momentarily to the consciousness of time. His eyes seemed no sooner to have closed than they opened again on the dawn. The blind was up, the window wide open. Over the tops of the pines he could see the first pale glint of sunlight on the sea, and in his ears there was a murmur as of tired waves patiently breaking. The air, sweet-scented by the pine wood from which it blew direct, freshened his senses and stimulated his mind to action. Adnam sat on the edge of his bed and rumbled his hair with both hands in an ecstasy of asking. Men! men! men! Men he demanded, and it was as if he would wring from his burnished locks some expedient by which he could procure the men that he wanted.

He worked in his room for some time after he was dressed, then went into the Orchard, savouring the sweetness of the morning air. Difficulties did not prevent Adnam from enjoy-

ing as he went along, and enjoying everything. The morning air was there to be breathed with pleasure although he had no men, and he snuffed it up in long deep draughts till the blood, refreshed, danced in his veins, and his spirits were exhilarated high above the point where doubts and fears obtrude to worry and perplex. The bare brown earth in half-laboured patches might be promising, but was not picturesque. Only the spaces reserved for footpaths were green. Adnam walked the whole length of the stream that skirted his acres with his eyes upon the water, but it was a thought that he was following out, a thought which he followed into every part of his little holding. Robert and Luke Banks were already at work. Their greetings were of the briefest. Luke was sulky as usual because he had not happened to find a job where, all the work being put out, he was left at leisure to give good advice. Robert respected his employer's mood. His own fine intelligence told him that thought, as well as manual labour, must be put into Adnam's undertaking, and that it is silence which makes the space that thought must have to move in freely if it would work well.

The birds sang, the sun was warming the land into life, the little field creatures rustled about furtively, intent on breakfast and a morning draught from the brook; a fitful breeze, sea-scented and also laden with balsamic odours from the pines, sighed softly with an intermittent, indeterminate sound of rustling leaves, like the swish of a tranquil sea on a shingly beach; the birds beginning to build were busily flying about; and Adnam stood and thought.

"What's he got now?" said Luke, and answered himself, since Robert took no notice. "Got the hump, you can see that! It's my belief the young gentleman's bitten off a bigger bit than he can chew, and it's beginning to choke him already. I've always said it would and I sticks to it."

Adnam suddenly became alert. He called to Robert: "Get on the same as yesterday. I'm going to Closeminster after breakfast and shall be away all day."

"Right," said Robert.

Luke sniggered when Adnam was out of earshot.

"Market day at Closeminster! Young sprig's going to ease his mind with a frolic," he jeered. "He's not much of a

Methodee, yer 'Mr.' Adnam isn't, not much more than the make-believe. I've heard tell of 'im up at the Brabant Arms."

"I've seen him there by the hour together," said Robert, resting on his spade and straightening his back. "What then? He wasn't swilling beer."

"Oh, no, of course not!" Luke sneered. "He was serving the Lord."

"So you might say," said Robert, taking him seriously. "A man serves the Lord best by serving his fellow men."

"And one serves one's fellow men sitting of an evening at the Brabant Arms!" Luke suggested. "The Lord must be well pleased with this, his servant." He doubled both fists and tapped his chest with his knuckles as he spoke.

"When you go there to learn the needs of your fellow men from their conversation, it's likely," said Robert. "But, as far as I've heard, you go there to preach, and damned bad doctrine, too."

He raised his spade and stuck it deep in the ground as he spoke, to emphasise his disapproval.

"If you'd ever been out of this beastly 'ole and seen something of the world, Bob," Luke rejoined, in the forbearing, tolerant tone of a man conscious of his own superiority, but not anxious to press his advantage, "you'd know better than to talk such rot. But there! It's always been the same and always will be. A prophet can't be a prophet in his own country."

"Which is the prophet?" Robert asked, and indicated his own opinion on the subject by relaxing into a smile.

Adnam had gone, but later they saw him on horseback, cantering down the road.

"Old Emery does young hopeful well in horseflesh," Luke remarked. "Breeds, doesn't he? That bay would make a good cavalry mount—officer's charger. And I will say the lad shows him off. He's got a seat."

"Ay, he's got a seat," said Robert, glad of a congenial topic, and so far relaxing as to look over the hedge with his brother at Adnam, who, with a light hand, was curbing the exuberant spirits of a very fresh horse. "He'll not be so lively comin' back. Doesn't get exercise enough now Mr. Adnam's on his

own job. He shows a horse off, that's true. He's taken one into Closeminster before now, and sold him in a jiffy——"

"For a gross of green spectacles," Luke opined.

"For double the price his father 'ad put on 'im," Robert concluded imperturbably.

"They say old Emery's the warmest man about here," Luke observed.

"Ay, but he wouldn't be if the others were out over their fields as he is from mornin' till night," Robert replied. "He's but a handful of acres compared to some on 'em, and the land hereabouts is good enough, though little's done with it. It's as Mr. Adnam says, there's no such thing as bad land; there's bad cultivators."

"Mr. Adnam!" Luke snarled—and then he felt better. "In honour preferring one another" was not in Luke's creed. To find a chance of offering disrespect where respect was due was a tonic to his system which always did him good. He was for levelling downwards.

Adnam rode on with eyes and mind intent on the double duty of seeing and foreseeing. It was a long ride, and much of his way lay through a rich region laid waste by neglect. Gates were broken, ditches choked, hedges overgrown, farm-houses empty or only occupied by caretakers, farm buildings crumbling to decay. In one village not a cottage was occupied, and the roof of the village smithy had fallen in. There were miles of poor pasturage with scarcely a head of cattle to the acre, and not a man at work in sight. Here and there he saw a few cottages with their food-patches under cultivation, but the people about them, suffering under their employer's lack of enterprise, and oppressed by the dull monotony of their labour and of lives into which no change to enliven them ever came, looked unhealthy and spiritless. The children also looked unhealthy and were ill-nourished, good wholesome bread being a luxury not to be had at all, and milk being very difficult to procure, even in the villages, and of very poor quality when it was to be had. The best blood of the countryside for practical purposes had died out or escaped to younger lands, where men are too much alive to stagnate in the old grooves; where progress is the end of effort, and the principle that "what was good enough for my father is good enough for me" is scouted

with ridicule. Ten miles into Closeminster Adnam rode, and dismounted, saddened by what he had seen on the way, as at a wrong done to himself.

He and Seraph, and their father before them, had been educated at the Closeminster Grammar School, and were known to many people in the place. Adnam put up his horse at the County Hotel and joined the Farmers' Ordinary, which he found in full session. Great pieces of roast and boiled stood on the board, and piled up dishes of vegetables. Adnam set to with a will, too ravenous after the long ride to be nice. There was a roar of talk about him. Tankards of beer were being brought in, and empty tankards taken away to be refilled. The guests who had finished eating were calling for spirits and water by way of climax to the feast. At first Adnam was not observed, but presently his youth, his well-cut riding suit, and a certain air of distinction peculiar to him, began to attract the attention of the homely farmers.

"A'n't you Emery Pratt's son?" an old man, who had been bending his brows upon him, as upon a puzzle, asked him at last.

"Yes," Adnam answered.

"Which on 'em."

"The youngest."

"It'll be you then as 'as the foreign lady mother," another old man observed. "I mind seein' 'er wi' yer father 'ere in Closeminster, a tender slip, but not enough of her fur use i' this rough world. You'll mind 'er, Farmer Benson?" this to the first speaker.

"Ay," Farmer Benson rejoined, breathing stertorously, and gazing at Adnam with great gravity. "The lad favours 'er"—a long pause—"an' 'is father too."

The men near Adnam stopped eating and drinking upon this, as at a signal, the operation being suspended just at the point it had reached, with here a fork held up half-way to the mouth and there a tankard tilted for drinking; and all eyes became focussed upon Adnam, in order to verify Farmer Benson's assertion. Happily for Adnam, whose colour was deepening under this close inspection, a diversion was caused just then by the entrance of Farmer Hallbin from Castlefield Saye, which relieved him from further embarrassment on that score.

"You there, Adnam?" the jovial Hallbin exclaimed, taking his seat opposite: "What you doin' in town, eh?"

"Now, don't you, Hallbin," said the bluff old man who minded Adnam's mother, with a wink. "You was young once yourself, an' wot was yer after in yer youth? I mind you. . . . !"

"I'm after men," burst from Adnam, inconsequently. The whole table roared.

"Eh, my!" said he-who-minded, wiping his eyes; "times is changed! It was the weemin we was after in our youth. . . . What d'ye want o' men, lad? Wot sort o' men?"

"Labourers for spade work," Adnam answered.

"For yer father?"

"No, for myself."

"Are you going to set up for yourself then?"

"I should be set up if I could get even a dozen men to start with."

"On how many acres?"

"Twelve," said Adnam.

The farmers looked at one another, speechless. A man to an acre was more than they could work about in their minds.

At last the old man who minded laughed.

"He's gettin' at us," he said. "I'd a done the same when I was young. I mind——"

But Hallbin interrupted: "What are ye at, Adnam?" he asked jocularly. "Is it pleasure-grounds for yer lady?"

"Yes," said Adnam, responding to the jocularity, "for my lady when she comes, if she likes good garden stuff."

"Oh, vegetables, be it," the old fellow rejoined, enlightened. "Well, they do pay here and there, I'm told. And I wish you luck. But as to gettin' men——"

"You'll be wasting yer time," said Farmer Benson, "an makin' the gals mad into the bargain, a pretty lad like you. I's warrant there's some wi' an eye on ye hereabouts."

"Eh," said Hallbin, quizzically. "I shouldn't be surprised myself. W'y, now I come to think o' it, I druv in the finest gal in the countryside myself to-day, from Castlefield Saye."

The whole table brightened to attention.

"Who might she be?" several asked.

"Ellery Banks's daughter, Miss Ella."

Adnam flushed at the name, and there was another roar of laughter.

"Yew didn't know, of course, that she was comin' in to-day?" Farmer Benson said sllily.

"Of course not," was the general comment in the same tone.

Adnam's native tact came to his rescue. He took the chaff with a good-natured smile, and left the jolly old boys to think what they pleased.

"I must be after the men, at any rate," he said, rising from the table. "If any of you gentlemen could tell me where to look, I'd be obliged."

"There might be some out-o'-works about," he-who-minded considered. "It 'ud be worth your while to go round the publics and inquire."

Adnam thanked him, wished the party good day collectively, and went off about his own business, leaving behind him a favourable impression upon the whole, but mixed. He was a likely lad, but the foreign stuff showed—that sort of bow he made, that wasn't English, therefore it wasn't the right thing. And twelve men to twelve acres when Farmer Hallbin was making a fortune with eight men on three hundred acres—there was something new-fangled about that although it was vegetables, and the new-fangled, of course, was not to be tolerated. Hence some suspicion of Adnam mixed with the favourable impression produced by his easy modest address and fine promising physique.

Meanwhile Adnam had started on a round of the public houses. The first he entered was empty; the next was crammed, and he had to wait for a seat. He found one at last at a table with two other men; one a soldier in uniform, a non-commissioned officer to judge by his numerous stripes; the other in mufti, but also obviously a soldier. Adnam did not notice them much at first. He was looking about him for what he wanted, gauging the company by observation before he committed himself to inquiry. A casual survey convinced him that there were no men present who would be of any use to him for spade work. He saw several soldiers among the civilians, and heard scraps of talk about the services, commerce, the country, and politics, but agriculture was not discussed. He

was about to go when something the non-commissioned officer at his table was saying to the man in mufti arrested his attention.

"The Militia's hard both on masters and men," the non-com declared. "When they're called up the masters loses their men and must either get others or let their work come to a standstill; and when they're disbanded the men's lost their situations."

"That's so," said the man in mufti. "And wot's the trainin' amount to? A few weeks under canvas once a year don't turn a ploughboy into a soldier, and it don't keep a short-service man up to the mark either. The ploughboy finds the discipline severe and hates it, and the short-service man finds it slack after the reg'lars and despises it."

"There's bin a lot of clack in the papers lately about the inefficiency of the army," said the non-com. "They're about wore out at Horseguards inventing of things to keep 'em quiet. They've got so desp'rate they're even talkin' of allowing chloroform for the medical or'ficers to use when they perform operations. It was new to the papers that they didn't 'ave it, an' they pounced on it like a shot, you can swear, an' played with it fur all it was worth; the pore soldier wot 'ad to suffer agonies at this latter end of the nineteenth century if the pore medical or'ficer 'ad the 'eart of a brute an' didn't buy the stuff out of 'is own pocket; an' the pore medical or'ficer wot 'ad to buy the stuff whether 'e could afford it or not, or be a brute. But that sort o' thing on'y keeps 'em going a week."

"Well, now it's tents," said the man in mufti. "They're playin' off tents now on the public for a change. The public 'ad got 'old of it that men weren't enlistin' and 'ad to 'ave a reason, so 'Orseguards scratched its 'ead and said 'tents.' And tents it is. Make the pore soldier comfy under canvas and the men'll 'list right enough. Look at the German Army, they tells 'em, an' then folks thinks they can see the German Army. You've only to tell 'em the German Army's better lodged and fed and the rest of it than ours and they'll tumble to that, and blackguard the Gov'ment. Then when they're well worked up, 'Orseguards comes in wi' a new sort o' tent. The contractors make a fortune on it out of the ratepayers' pence, and the ratepayer's satisfied. He's 'ad 'is change." The man in

mufti spat upon the floor. "The public's a gull. Fur what was wrong wi' the old tents, I arsk yer? We slept in 'em right enough. I never saw a man the worse for being under canvas, and I've 'ad twenty-one years' service. But the old tents 'as got to go or the Gov'ment must. The British public's got a panic on and must 'ave something to pacify it. The truth of the matter won't. The public's an infant what wants a lot of colour, and the papers can't colour up the truth enough to please it. So the old tents 'as got to be throwed at the British public to be tore up; an' while the British public is a-tearing the old tents up and discussing the cost of new ones with one eye on the safety of the country and the other on their own pockets, 'Orseguards and the Gov'ment will be safe fur a snooze."

"An' the extra fag of it all comes upon us," said the non-com in a tone of disgust.

This talk of tents suggested an idea to Adnam which he seized upon instantly.

"What do you do with the old tents?" he asked.

The men looked at him as if they had not noticed him before and were startled to find him there.

"'Ev I the honour to speak to a or'ficer?" said the non-com mincingly.

"No," said Adnam. "I am a—a gardener."

"Umph," said the man in mufti, with that engaging pleasantness which implies suspicion. "I see no soil on your boots."

"Coorse not," said the non-com genially, looking hard at the mufti man as he spoke. "The young gentleman nat'rally cleaned 'is boots to go and meet 'is young lady, same as I'd put on an extra dab of pipeclay."

Adnam attended to the chaff with an inscrutable countenance, and when the men stopped, he went on as if there had been no interruption: "I want to know what becomes of the old tents."

"Pr'aps ye're wantin' one to live in?" the mufti man said bantering.

"I am wanting one to put a dozen men in if I could get a good one, water-tight, big enough, and a fair price."

"I'd apply to 'Orseguards if I was you, sir," said the non-

com. "Write on blue foolscap, arf margin, beginnin' 'Sir,' and concludin' 'I 'ave the honour to be yer obedient servant.'"

The men exchanged glances and got up. The non-com twisted his moustache, shook out the legs of his trousers, re-set his cap at the right rake, and made for the door, flipping his leg with his swagger stick as he went. The mufti man lingered behind, marking time by putting out the stump of his cigar, buttoning his coat, and making a pretense of taking a deep draught from his empty tankard; but really hesitating, with his eye on Adnam, examining him closely.

"I'd 'a' said you was a young or'ficer," he remarked in a casual tone, "if you 'adn't a denied it."

"Would you!" said Adnam. "Then you know less about young officers than I do—unless it's a new order, a sop for the Socialists, that young officers should henceforth frequent public houses, and drink beer with the non-coms, fraternally, whenever they meet."

"Y'ave me there!" said the mufti man. "A Militiaman might do it though, or a greenhorn, once in a way. I've known 'em ruxed for sim'lar games."

He affected to give it up, and syaggered off when he had spoken, but was evidently not satisfied. Adnam followed him out into the street, and there encountered the three old farmers, Hallbin, Benson and he-who-minded, all very jovial by this time.

"'Ello, young Adnam!" Hallbin exclaimed. "Got yer men?"

"No," said Adnam; "but I shall get them all right."

He made his escape up the street, but looked round as he turned the corner. The mufti man was in close confab with the three jovial farmers.

Adnam went on. He found a double pleasure in the narrow old streets, all animated with the life and motion of market day, the pleasure of the moment and the pleasure of old association. He looked into the bright shop windows with interest, and at the grammar-school boys he met with their mortar-boards on. They all seemed to be much younger than his lot had been, and he had to recall the little concerns of school life from a distance, as it were, which made him feel aged. Still, he knew how they felt about things, and that kept him

in touch with them, although, at the same time, he marked the difference in himself. He realized that it mattered not at all to him now whether Balbus had or had not built a wall, and that it never would matter; yet he did not regret the time that he had been obliged to spend in learning that and similar things in the driest and most laborious manner. He had no theories on the subject of education; no quarrel with the masters who had taught him all about the ancients and nothing about the moderns, and had launched him into the life of his own times practically quite unprepared for anything that might happen to him. There had been no systematic direction of his education towards the formation of his character; no direction but the vaguest with regard to the conduct of life; he had been left to pick up a knowledge of himself, and of the world he had to live in, haphazard and piecemeal. The only fixed principles that there had been any attempt to inculcate had been of the conservative kind a century old, which, when any change is suggested, even a change for the better, finds expression in the formula, "The country is going to the dogs, sir." He had been turned out to deal with mankind like a child who is learning to speak, his outfit being his own ability to learn. The child begins with a word, it goes on to a combination of two words, it masters a sentence, it learns to ask for what it wants, to express a tiny abstract idea. It does not know by what rules it makes itself intelligible; it may never learn that language is governed by any rules at all; but, on the other hand, it may learn grammar. So Adnam had no theories of life to demonstrate. What he was doing he was doing for himself, and learning to do as he went along. His work was the expression of his own wants, an attempt to supply them. But, all the same, he was imbibing the grammar of life, thanks to his environment. He was learning insensibly to be an intelligent part of the great effort which humanity is making to help itself up. He was under the ordering of the Will that is over our wills, a part of the force by which mankind is compelled to do as well as to be. In his mother's company he breathed the atmosphere of those who yearn for change, who are filled with the immortal longing to progress from bad to better, and so on to the best to which it is in human nature to attain. This longing, innate and ineradicable, finds

for itself in the tendency of the times such food as it requires to strengthen its growth and mature it to effectual purposes. By degrees Adnam might discover the rules for himself, enlightened, probably, by the consequences of having inadvertently broken them; but at present he did not even know that there was a grammar of life, which must be used if life is to be beautifully lived and profitably. He saw nothing beyond his own purpose, and his one conscious object now was to further that purpose. As he stepped out buoyantly, a handsome girl looked up in his face, and brightened at its beauty; Adnam returned her glance with an intentness that brought the colour to her cheeks and quickened her step; but he had not seen her. He was thinking of stable manure. And he was on his way to make a contract with the principal livery stable keeper in the city for a regular supply from him of all that he had and might have.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Adnam Pratt," he heard some one say behind him. He slackened his pace, looked round, and found the mufti man at his elbow.

"If you're as 'ard to overtake in a bargain as you are at a walk, you'll do well for yourself," said the mufti man, out of breath. "You go as fast as you think."

"You followed me?" said Adnam.

"I did—when I found out who you was. I couldn't place you in the pub. I didn't know but what you might be one of them furrin chaps, come over to do a bit o' spyin' on yer own. There's a word now and then in yer speech, a sort of a roll, that isn't Queen's English as we pronounce it; so I inquired of that old farmer chap as seemed to know you, and found you was all right. Furrin trick of yer tongue accounted for by yer mother bein' a German lady. You was askin' about military stores?"

"I was asking about tents," said Adnam.

"Well, I know about tents," said the mufti man. "I'm quartermaster 'ere at the Deepot, Macquillan, by name."

"What," said Adam, "and drinking at a public house with a non-com!"

"The non-com's my brother," Mr. Macquillan explained. "I'm a ranker myself, you know. My brother's just 'ome from furrin service. And the pub belongs to an uncle. But what

I came to say is, you mustn't take that bluff at the pub fur serious. It was just stuffing for a spy. But if you want any information I can give you, I'll be 'appy to oblige."

"Thank you," said Adnam. "I want to pick up a tent or some tents, cheap, that will keep out the wet—good-sized ones. Can you let me have some?"

"A 'ospital marquée would 'old a dozen men, and keep out the weather," Macquillan answered. "A bell tent wouldn't 'old more nor eight men, not including bedding. No quarter-master is allowed to dispose of any stores in his charge except the reg'lations is complied with. Gov'ment stores can't be obtained by a civilian until condemned by a Board of Or'ficers convened by order, consistin' of a President and members of junior rank. Condemned stores is sold by contract, usually to a firm of Jews. W'en would you be wanting the tent?"

"Immediately, I hope. Only I don't know the size yet till I get my men."

"Well, if you'll let me know I'll do what I can," said Macquillan. "How would an or'ficer's mess tent be?"

"I'll let you know," said Adnam. "And I'm much obliged. A letter would find you at the Depôt, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

Adnam gave him good day, and went on to the livery stables. There he found, as he expected, that the proprietor disposed of his stable stuff now to one person and now to another, as opportunity offered, and Adnam found no difficulty in proving to him that having a place in which to dump it regularly would not only be more convenient but more profitable. How to transport it so far was the difficulty. Men's minds in Close-minster moved slowly, enterprise was altogether lacking. Trains and canals had been long enough established for the proprietor to know of them. Adnam pointed out that neither came near his acres. The proprietor scratched his head, and tried to argue the acres into a better position. Failing to persuade Adnam that his Orchard was not where it always had been, he suggested carts at a foot's pace as the only means of transit, but Adnam flatly refused to believe it, and by dint of hard questioning at last discovered that the city contained a traction engine and waggons, new-fangled things, which the proprietor seemed to think were only taken round for show, like the

elephants in a circus. Adnam made for the owner of the strange machine, and, finding him of another breed, came to terms with him for his purpose at once.

The day was waning and Adnam had still to find his men. He had inquired as he went along, and had heard of one here and there and searched them out. Once on the right track it had not been hard to find men unemployed. The difficulty was to find just what he wanted. Gardeners objected to the preliminary amount of spade work, which was only fit for navvies, they said. They wanted a ready-made garden.

"I'm not a jack o' all trades," one man told him. "I can do wi' glass, an' I can do wi' flowers, an' I ain't no objection to vegetables, but diggin' up a field arn't in my line."

"Well, I don't want a dozen head gardeners at present," Adnam answered. "The field's got to be dug and sifted."

"That's not my line," said the man.

"Not good enough you mean, eh?" said Adnam. "You're out of work, are you not?" He might have said out-at-elbow also, but a certain grace of nature in Adnam revolted from insult as an argument when dealing with a man already obviously down on his luck.

The man acknowledged that he was, but the hide-bound conventions of his class were proof against starvation itself. He was an experienced gardener and had always worked in a ready-made garden. All Adnam wanted of him at present was to dig in a field, the work of a common labourer. He suspected Adnam of trying to impose upon him somehow, and would have nothing to do with him and his field.

After some more failures Adnam gave up the search, and, acting on a sudden inspiration, he went off to the offices of the local newspaper to insert an advertisement for what he wanted. It struck him that that was what he ought to have done at first, but he did not blame himself for the oversight. It was not the custom to advertise for men in those parts, and it was not his way to waste energy in regretting. He just made use of the idea when it came to him, and was glad that he had thought of it at all. He had done good work in the day, and, if not as much as he expected, at least as much as he could, and had prepared the way for much more. Satisfied to this extent, he was returning to the inn to get something to eat before

he started on the long ride home, when, framed between the houses at the end of a narrow irregular street, he caught a familiar glimpse of the old Cathedral.

There was a vein of his mother's mysticism in Adnam, which was apt to determine his actions at odd times. The heterogeneous collection of attributes of which a man is made cannot all be active at once. Man's higher powers are independent of his will, and their action is intermittent. He cannot command them, they command him, and the one wise thing for him to do is to obey, to seize the moment when it comes, and write, invent, make music, paint, prophesy, or pray, according to the impulse urging him. With the sight of the age-old walls of the grey Cathedral there came a call to Adnam, a flash from the Spirit. The labours of his busy mind were suspended. He was snatched up from the lower plane of thought to that higher region, where, in intervals of ecstasy, creature and Creator work together, as one, to remould the destiny of mankind to its pristine beauty; that beauty which is forever being marred by the desecrating efforts of man himself.

Adnam passed from the sunshine of the street into the gloom of the Cathedral. The great organ was pealing, and the sound was to the ear as sailing clouds are to the eye; a full rich volume, an atmosphere, vibrating, stirring soul and sense together, rolling about the pillared aisles in long reverberations, rising to the raftered roof as incense rises, symbol of aspiration, source at once of the desire to mount and of the power.

It was Evensong, and Adnam knelt.

CHAPTER XIV

ON his way from the Cathedral, Adnam stood at the corner, waiting for an opportunity to cross the road. There was an open space here, across which several streets poured their traffic. For the moment there was a congestion of carts and carriages, and many people, stopped like Adnam on the footway at the corner, were watching for a chance to slip across. Among them Adnam noticed Luke Banks, leading a bicycle with one hand,

and in the other holding one of those satchels of bass-matting which people use to carry fish in. Close beside him, a young lady was trying to curb the exuberance of a pretty sturdy child and a white wire-haired terrier with a black patch over one eye. They had seized upon the halt as an opportunity for a game together. The child was straining from his mother's grasp to reach the dog, which was "wuffing" and bounding about them, using every expedient which a lively dog may use to tempt a child to play. In one of his turns Luke's basket caught his eye, and he sprang up at it. Luke started back and then hit at the dog with the basket like a man afraid.

"What do you mean by comin' out with a dog like that?" he shouted at the lady brutally. "He's a danger to the public, and I'll have the law of you."

The young lady looked at him in amazement. She was a little lady, with plenty of spirit.

"Yes, you may look," Luke snarled. "But I'll make you pay for your dog. You think you can do what you like because you're a lady."

The expression of her face changed. "Oh, don't think that!" she said.

"Think? I know—I know the whole breed of you," he answered roughly.

"Please let me explain," she said. "The dog is little more than a puppy. He saw your basket and jumped up at it. That was his way of offering to carry it for you. I am sorry he startled you."

"You are!" Luke sneered. He was about to add something offensive, when he caught Adnam's eye. Adnam made for him, but was checked by a cry from the young lady. The child and dog, taking advantage of a moment of inattention, had escaped together into the middle of the road, right into the thick of the traffic. Adnam sprang after them, seized the child and landed him on the curb, but was knocked down himself by the shaft of a cart which caught him just as the driver pulled up, and rolled him over. A dozen hands were stretched out to help him, but he picked himself up, and, in answer to kindly inquiries from all sides, declared that he was all right. A man handed him his hat, and remarked: "That were neatly done, young gent."

The dog came bounding out from under the horses' feet, and stood looking up at Adnam expectantly, as if he were inviting him to do it again, for his special amusement.

"Oh, I hope you are not hurt," the young lady said. She had the child clasped in her arms and was very white. "How can I thank you? And, oh, do look at the mud on you!"

The watering cart had made a puddle just at the spot where Adnam slipped, and he was bespattered from head to foot.

"It is nothing," he said, and looked about for a means of escape from the crowd which was pressing round him. He found the position of popular hero more embarrassing than pleasant, but the young lady would not let him go.

"You must come home with me," she insisted. "My husband will want to thank you. And you can be well brushed there." This latter inducement was hastily added as she saw Adnam recoil from the invitation to go and be thanked. But even the offer of a clothes brush was not enough; he was still for making his escape. She was determined not to let him go, however, unknown and unrewarded, and hastily changed her tactics.

"Take him," she said in an exhausted voice, holding the child out to Adnam. "I cannot carry him. He's too heavy."

Adnam instinctively took the child, and the next moment found himself facing the alternative either of being left in sole possession of it, or of following wherever its mother chose to lead him; for, with a "Come quick!" the young lady, taking advantage of a break in the traffic, had darted across the road as soon as he relieved her of her burden. She led him quickly up one quiet street and down another, until they came to a row of small houses with little gardens in front, facing the open country, at one of which she stopped. A young man in the undress uniform of an infantry officer, a man of medium size, well set up and with a pleasant face, came out of the house as she reached the gate, and stopped with a look of inquiry when he saw the procession.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing, I'm thankful to say," the young lady panted, out of breath. "But, oh, there very nearly was; there would have been but for this gentleman. Lal got away from me and ran out into the road after Jock, and would have been run over,

only this gentleman pulled him away in time and was knocked down himself."

The young man took the child and kissed it, then grasped Adnam's hand without a word; no word was necessary; none could have been so eloquent as the tears in his eyes.

"Come in," he said, turning his back in truly English fashion to conceal his emotion, and leading the way into the house.

Just then Jock arrived in the highest spirits. He jumped up at the child in its father's arms, by way of saluting it, circled round and round Adnam, "wuffing" joyously, as if inviting him to have some more fun, made believe that the tail of his mistress's skirt was a rat and shook and worried it vigorously, and then rushed into the house and upstairs as if he had suddenly remembered something he ought to have done and was off to repair the omission. Relations had been a little strained by feeling when Jock arrived, but he had come at the right moment to make a diversion. By the time they had each managed to excuse themselves from their share of his attentions, a normal attitude towards each other was established, and Adnam's bespattered habiliments came naturally into the conversation. A tall soldier servant in mufti was called from the back premises, and stood to attention, awaiting orders, his countenance a blank, and all initiative suspended. In the presence of his superior officer he was like a machine which gives no evidence of motor power until its driver sets it in motion. A question produced this result. In answer to it, he stated that the mud would brush off best when it had dried.

"In the meantime we'll have tea," said Adnam's hostess. They were standing in the little front sitting-room, and, as she spoke, a fine healthy squall resounded through the house. "There's baby," she broke off. "That villain Jock has wakened baby. Run, Clitheroe."

The soldier servant right about turned, took the narrow staircase at the double, and disappeared. His heavy tread was heard quick-march overhead, and the tune above suddenly ceased in the middle of a *crescendo* passage.

"Baby's always good with Clitheroe," baby's mother remarked casually. "I'll go and make tea. What is your name,

by the by? It's so awkward not to be able to call you anything. I shall always think of you as Lal's preserver, but that's not workable as an every-day appellation. I am Mrs. Perry and this is my husband, Lieutenant in the Shire Light Infantry, and Adjutant at the Dépôt."

"My name is Pratt, Adnam Pratt," Adnam replied, the foreign touch in his pronunciation accentuated by the awkwardness of having to mention his own name.

"You live in the neighbourhood?" his host asked.

"At Castlefield Saye. My father is a farmer," Adnam answered.

"Then there are gentlemen farmers in the county," his host remarked, in the tone of a man who has acquired an interesting item of information. "We were told that there were only the great landowners."

"My father is of the Yeomanry," Adnam explained.

There was a perceptible pause before his host remarked in a hearty tone: "They are a fine body, our English Yeomanry."

"You are thinking of them as cavalry, perhaps," Adnam suggested with a smile.

"I am thinking of what I have always heard of them as men," was the reply, "and judging by the specimen before me."

"It is of my father's generation that you must have heard," Adnam replied, colouring and bowing as he gracefully passed the compliment on. He spoke with the foreign side of him, which was apt to be so puzzling to strangers, more in evidence than usual. This was generally the case with him on occasions when a little more manner than Englishmen can accomplish, as a rule, came to him involuntarily by way of relief to his diffidence, or as a cover to his embarrassment.

A heavy tread was heard on the stairs, and Clitheroe appeared at the sitting-room door. He was carrying the baby, a fine specimen a few months old, comfortably enthroned on his arm. A sunbonnet very much awry on her head bore witness to the excellence of Clitheroe's intentions, the limit of his knowledge, and the imperfections of his training as a nurse. When he appeared, the house and all it contained, including its master and mistress, seemed to shrink in size, he was so ludicrously large for the place. The irrepressible Jock was

bounding round and round him, and Lal had hooked himself on to the seam of his trousers in default of a coat-tail within reach.

"Will I take the young lady out, sir?" he said, addressing her father.

"Yes—up and down," was the reply.

Clitheroe, being on fatigue duty with both hands full, right turned, eyes left for the salute, and marched out. He was presently seen doing a leisurely sentry-go in front of the row of little houses, the baby crowing on his arm and clutching at his moustache, Jock and Lal playing about him. The sun had set behind the range of low hills which bounded the broad fertile plain on which the little houses looked out, but the cloudless sky was still bright with the golden glory of the after-glow, and ever and anon the soldier gazed afar with quiet eyes into the heart of the radiance, as if on the watch for something to come; but not an enemy, surely, from that direction—a relief, perhaps, or a company of baby angels drawn to earth by the laughter of their little sister!

Mrs. Perry had taken off her gloves, and was taking off her hat. "Now I *must* go and make tea," she said, as if somebody were trying to prevent her. "You can come and help me if you like," she threw back over her shoulder at her husband and Adnam impartially, as she left the room, and led the way into the neat little kitchen. "There's the kettle to be put on, bread and butter to be cut, lettuces to be washed—I like lettuces for tea, but I hate messing with water. Who'll volunteer for the lettuces?" She looked into the back kitchen, and exclaimed: "Oh, there they are! in that bowl on the sink—bless Clitheroe, he's washed them for me. You've only to shake off the water and dry them—here's a clean towel. Dab them on it, and then lay them symmetrically on a dish. I'm very particular about the symmetrical arrangement of lettuce leaves. Here, I'll get you a dish."

All this was to Adnam, who had followed her into the back kitchen. It was like playing a game of housekeeping, and he entered into it at once with the zest which he was accustomed to put into everything he did. Playing about with these young people drove away the uncomfortable feeling that an unnecessary fuss was being made about such a natural and trifling act

as pulling a child out of the way of a cart, and set him at his ease.

Perry came bustling in with a great show of activity. "I'm told off to boil the kettle," he said. "Here, Mr. Adnam, by your leave—stand aside—I must fill it at your tap."

Having done so, he put it on a gas-ring in the kitchen, and was taking out a cigarette as a reward of merit when his wife shrieked at him: "Oh, Alick, you *are* a help! Look at that kettle!"

He looked, but saw nothing wrong. "It's full," he said.

"Yes, it's full," she retorted. "And when do you think it will boil?"

He uttered a prolonged ejaculation, and hurriedly took out his matchbox.

"I should think so!" she said. "Aren't you a man all over! Would a woman have put a kettle on to boil without lighting the gas?"

"No, my dear," her husband rejoined; "a woman would have set the gas flaring full blast and put on an empty kettle. 'We are but parts of one stupendous whole.' Men and women make the same mistakes, but make them differently. It comes to the same thing, however, in the end—the kettle does not boil. Thus is the balance of nature preserved. What are you doing to further this great work, O preserver of my child?" he called to Adnam in the back kitchen.

"My best," Adnam rejoined. Turning round as he spoke he caught the side of the dish on which he was placing the lettuces and dashed it from the edge of the sink to the floor. His consternation excited the mirth of the youthful pair.

"Pick up the bits," his hostess ordered. "Get another dish from the dresser there, and wash those lettuces again thoroughly. If you do any more damage you shan't have any. And if you leave a grit of sand in them you shall eat them all."

Adnam got the lettuces into the bowl again and hastily turned the tap on them.

Making a jest of everything, the three of them played the game of getting tea ready, the lady doing all the ordering and most of the work, and talking. She was continually flying at her husband to keep him going, he being for relaxation and a

cigarette after every little thing he did. Adnam was much more useful. When the tea-cups were put on the tray he remembered that spoons would be wanted, and hunted some up on his own initiative. He found large kitchen spoons, constitutionally brassy, and much battered; but remembering them at all showed such aptitude for housekeeping that, as his hostess told him, it was evident he would be a treasure as a married man of limited income.

"Which means that I am not a treasure," Perry put in.

"No, you're a trial," was the quick retort. "Fetch Lal, there's a dear. I must get him ready."

Lal, having been retrieved from the ditch on the other side of the road, was taken upstairs by his mother, who, after a lively skirmish, brought him down again, looking unnaturally clean, and enthroned him on a high chair at the table. Tea was then declared ready, and the three sat down to it as intimately as if getting tea ready together was one of the usual occupations of their daily lives. The tea-things and flowers, reflected in the dark polished surface of the round mahogany table on which they were set out, made a pretty still-life picture.

"We are very poor, you see——" Mrs. Perry began to explain.

"But as dishonest as we can safely be," her husband put in, catching Adam's glance at the opulent display of plate and china on the table. "This haul is nothing to some——"

"Of our other wedding presents," his wife interrupted.

"That is the way you spoil everything!" her husband plaintively ejaculated.

"I was telling you," she resumed, addressing Adnam. "We are too poor to keep servants. We have only Clitheroe and a soldier's wife who comes in every morning to do things——"

"Or should come, but her energy is intermittent," Perry supplemented parenthetically.

"We don't dine," Mrs. Perry continued. "We have tea like this; and then supper, when I've put the babies to bed. After supper I sew. I make all the children's things, and do all the mending, and Alick reads to me——"

"Such are the hardships of a soldier's life!" Alick commented.

"Such good times we have," she went on, after making a feint of throwing a plate at him. "I never knew people could be so happy! And now I can't understand how people who are married can be anything else. Every hour of our day we are busy——"

"Keeping up appearances——"

"Don't listen to him," she cried. "We don't pretend to anything. We just live our own lives openly, within our means, and to the best purpose we know. Out of debt, out of danger we are. We serve God and our country with our whole hearts, and everybody calls on us——" Checked by this stumble, she stopped short, and they all burst out laughing. "What I mean is," she tried to explain. "What do I mean?" she broke off again, appealing to her husband prettily.

"You see it's like this," he said, in the bantering tone which comes of confidence and deep affection. "You have heard of Women's Rights?" Adnam looked as if he had. "And you must also have heard that the women who demand new rights are contentious bodies who clamour and shriek, scorn domestic duties, neglect their homes, despise their husbands, and are altogether unsexed and objectionable? My dear sir, a more dangerous fallacy was never circulated. It disarms us poor men, and leaves us without a suspicion to save us from falling into the toils of the most domesticated tyrants the world has yet produced."

"Here, have a cigarette," his wife interrupted, handing him one of several that she had confiscated while they were making tea. He took it gratefully, and she lighted it for him. "There is no way of bringing him to the point," she explained to Adnam.

"The point?" he said meditatively, between two whiffs. "Let me see, what was the point? Oh—I was going to tell you. Perhaps you have guessed? I am the victim of one of these designing women. This simple-seeming lady somehow bamboozled me into believing that there is only one life worth living." He looked around the little room and Adnam's glance followed his. Everything his eye rested upon, the few good reproductions of great symbolic pictures, the neat bookshelves, the scanty furniture, the pretty tea-table—everything bespoke purity of taste, refinement, cultivation. And in this delightful

setting he saw the young pair gaily busy, making a pleasure of what to most people would have been sordid drudgery; happy in each other and in their healthy children; all their powers, physical, mental and spiritual, nourished and strengthened by temperate daily exercise. "The only life worth living," Perry went on, seriously now, "is to choose your mate while you are young, adopt a set of principles and live up to them cleanly, making it a duty to enjoy as you go along, and to enjoy everything—work as well as play; and to get good out of everything—I was going to say even out of the hardships, but I mean more particularly out of the hardships. We've had our little difficulties," he added, dropping the didactic tone. They looked at each other, and broke into silent laughter. "We faced them. And that's all we remember of them."

"Speak for yourself," she contradicted him. "I very well remember what I suffered when the other ladies of the regiment discovered that I kept no nurse, and had to wheel my baby out myself in his perambulator."

"You went on wheeling him out——"

"Of course I did. And I made the Colonel——"

"The Colonel is a bachelor," her husband interrupted significantly.

"What has that to do with it?" she demanded.

"He was able to judge for himself."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "That is what you think of women, is it?"

"Well, don't we hear it from women themselves? Don't some of them object to the bother of being enfranchised and having to vote, giving as a reason that their sweet womanly influence is powerful enough to drive any number of men to the——"

"*Alick!*" she exclaimed.

"There, too, if you like, my dear," he said. "But I was going to say to the poll. And that being the case, it is natural to infer that the husband of one of these powerful ladies is not allowed to judge for himself. Had one of the ladies of the regiment who made you suffer been the Colonel's wife, the Colonel wouldn't have called upon you."

"No," she acknowledged. "I don't suppose he would. But I was going to tell you, Mr. Adnam, that I made the Colonel

hold Lal one day when he called, and I was rash enough to offer him tea, and then had to get it ready for him. Lal was an angel that day. And the Colonel said it was the best tea that had ever been made for him in the Regiment, and he sat and talked and talked, and I lent him a book, and he lent me one afterwards, and came again often for tea. And now Alick is Dépôt Adjutant."

This last detail seemed irrelevant to Adnam at the time, but afterwards he saw the connection. That old Colonel had had his own idea of the qualities which make an officer and a gentleman, and being an observant man had discovered them in their outcome. It is not by his exceptional doings that a man's worth can be determined; exceptional circumstances make for exceptional acts. The conduct of a man's daily life gives the only reliable clue to his character. Show him attending to every drudging detail of his ordinary duties with patient regularity, and you may be sure that when the extraordinary occasion comes he will be disciplined to face it creditably. In the steady devotion to details our wills grow strong.

Adnam parted from his new friends as some people tell their stories, without founding any reflection upon them. In youth we live from incident to incident, as if each were isolated and done with as soon as it is over. And, indeed, in this respect some are young to the very end. They never see that there is a distinct pattern in the mosaic of life to which every incident adds its quota, upon which every one is engaged, these doing the good work which enriches the vast design, those the bad which results in ugly blemishes if not in the great defects that do so much to mar the beauty of the whole fabric.

On his way back to the hotel, Adnam found himself in a stream of people making for the Public Hall, which he had to pass. Glancing at the notice-boards to see what was going on, he found that a great violinist was giving a concert that evening. The violin was his own instrument, and his opportunities of hearing it played by a master were few. This was too good a one to be lost, and he determined to take advantage of it. Entering with the crowd, and serenely indifferent to the effect of his costume on his neighbours in evening dress, he secured

a good seat, bought a programme, and began to study it. It opened with a long description of the first piece, a Beethoven sonata. Various interpretations were put upon various passages. Adnam ran his eye down the next part of the programme, and caught the words "elemental," "passion," "dawn," "cuckoo," and "storm." Wordy expositions of what a master means in his serious work were an offence to Adnam. Music may be an aid to words for the very reason that words can do nothing for music, because music is the higher form of expression; the form which passes the limit of verbal expression; which carries man up, liberates his spirit, and gives him a means of communication with the Highest. This was music as Adnam had been taught to understand it. He dropped the offending programme on the floor, folded his arms, and sat for the rest of the time absorbed in the purest emotional delight that human nature is capable of experiencing.

The old Cathedral city went to rest early. When Adnam rode away the moon was shining full upon the quiet streets, which seemed to be resting themselves after the turmoil of a busy day. Scarcely a soul was to be seen about, and the scattered few who appeared looked like furtive shadows that had evaded the substance to which they belonged, and were slipping off quietly, unattached, on errands of their own. The blood of his ancestors stirred in Adnam as he rode through the old irregular streets. The spell of the music was still upon him and the enchantment of the hour. It was all familiar to him, this city, touched into mediæval picturesqueness by the moon. He had ridden here of old, at night, alone; on a plunging steed that resented the tightened rein which was checking his impatience to be off. The iron-shod hoofs had struck sparks from the pavement then as now, and their intrusive clatter had jarred on the hallowed stillness of the hour. A young knight, his sword girt to his side, his armour ringing; warrior and troubadour both, setting forth on high emprise, eager to succour a damsel in distress, to slay a dragon, or to perform any other doughty deed that might offer by the way. Nor had he long to wait. Just outside the city on the raised footpath that bordered the open road in front of him, distinct in the moonlight, he saw something, some one, walking in the direction

in which he was riding, a figure, the figure of a girl—his dream come true. He was going along at a smart canter at the moment, but pulled up with a start, the start of one suddenly aroused from sleep. The girl turned round.

"Ella!" he exclaimed.

"Adnam!" she rejoined. "Thank goodness."

"What are you doing here all alone?" he asked.

"I'll tell you—only let us get on."

"How?"

"Why—" she considered a little. "Let *me* get on. There is room enough on that horse of yours for us both."

He looked up at her stupidly, as she stood above him on the raised path.

"Oh, slow moving wits of man!" she exclaimed. "Don't you see? Have you never heard of a pillion?"

"I don't carry one about with me unfortunately," he said. "Could you stick on without?"

"I will," she answered with characteristic determination.

He manœuvred the horse to the bank, but it was not so easy to get her up behind him. They managed it, however, somehow, in spite of the restiveness of the horse, which had seen some impropriety in the whole proceeding, and began actively to object to the double burden as soon as it was inflicted upon him. Ella flung her arms round Adnam and held on tight. Adnam let the horse know which was master. He plunged and backed, then bounded forward. Ella laughed.

"This is glorious!" she said.

Field and hedgerow slipped past them. One moment they were engulfed in heavy shadows cast by the trees, the next they were out again in the open, with the moonlight full upon them. The horse with his ears pricked forward, showed the whites of his eyes as he glanced this way and that in alarm, as at things which his riders could not see. But he kept up the pace for some distance, then gave in, snorted, and gradually slackened down to a walk, making a pretext of a little hill, which he breasted with the dignity of one who has good excuse for a change of mind.

"You're all right?" Adnam asked over his shoulder.

"I'm alive," she rejoined. "I know what the seventh heaven is now. It is the seventh heaven when one feels alive like this."

"What were you doing alone on the road at this time of night?" Adnam asked.

"Waiting for you," she replied. "I heard at the County Hotel that you had not gone, and just walked on to let you overtake me. I should have been in a nice plight if you hadn't! I felt I must get home somehow. They would have been frightened to death if I had not returned. Farmer Hallbin brought me in, and was to have driven me back, and I waited and waited, and at last discovered that he had gone and left me. He'd forgotten all about me, I suppose."

Adnam, remembering how jovial Farmer Hallbin was becoming even early in the afternoon, thought this very likely and also just as well, but he said nothing.

"I came in to sell some lace," Ella went on. "And, oh, I had such luck! I heard as soon as I got to the hotel that there were some rich Americans there who had stopped to see the Cathedral, and it just flashed upon me that they might like to see my lace too. I promised mother full compensation for the poultry the fox killed, and I've been working every hour of daylight ever since, and I had some lovely pieces. My trouble was, should I get my price for them? The shops would not give it, I knew, so my only hope was to hawk it."

"You got your price?" Adnam asked with interest.

"I got just double my price!" she replied triumphantly.

The episode meant more to her than Adnam could have gathered from the bald account of it she gave him; it meant positive assurance of the power of her own personality. Faith may be independent of proof, but it is not indifferent to it; faith in ourselves least of all. Ella, having heard of the rich Americans at the hotel, obtained the number of their sitting-room, went straight up to it, and knocked at the door without hesitation. She did not even stop to consider the advisability of sending up to ask for permission to present herself; that would have been giving them a chance to refuse, a bad strategic measure. As was inevitable the reply to her knock was "Come in!" and the preliminary difficulty was surmounted. She entered with her air of a young princess in exile, a mingling of the pride which conveyed a sense of her own dignity and of the winning diffidence of youth. Nothing could have been less like a person who was going about selling things. The lady, who was alone in the room, turned from the window in which

she was standing, looking out into the street—a bright American woman, beautifully dressed, not much older than Ella herself, and attractive by reason of the graceful cordiality of her manner, rather than from any distinctive beauty of form or feature. She looked inquiringly at Ella, and then came forward: "You want me?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon if I am disturbing you," Ella said. "But I have some lace to sell. I thought you might like to see it. I am a lacemaker. You doubtless know the kind I make. Most ladies have some of it."

"Come right in, and let me see what you've got," the American answered, gazing hard at Ella as she spoke.

Ella opened her bundle and spread the contents out on a table: "I have no very large piece to show you," she said. "The last I made was bought by the Duchess of Castlefield Saye."

"What did the duchess give you for it?" the American asked with frank curiosity.

"Three hundred pounds," Ella answered.

"My!" the lady exclaimed, after turning the pounds into dollars. "Your work's worth something!"

"I am obliged to take what I can get," Ella answered sighing. "The Duchess drove a hard bargain, but I wanted money. Here is a piece of the same kind." She held a delicate morsel up against her black dress to bring out the pattern. "It is rare. The only piece for sale in the world at the present moment, because nobody else can make this kind now. I rediscovered how myself from a piece that had been preserved for generations in an old family in this neighbourhood."

The lady took the lace and examined it.

"George!" she called urgently.

George appeared from the next room, a capable looking, middle-sized, middle-aged, middling bald, middling stout man, with a pleasant face.

"I want you to see this beautiful thing," she said, holding out the lace to him, but indicating Ella with her eyes.

"O Lord, how wonderful are Thy works!" he ejaculated under his breath. "I've heard of the South Country maids—you are a South Country maid, I presume?" he broke off cautiously. Ella smiled. "And now I see one! Well, all I

can say is it was worth crossing the Atlantic in a cyclone just to see one." Ella's head went up and her colour too. "Now I see something else," he added apologetically. "I see that I shouldn't have said it. You must excuse an American. It's our custom to speak out."

"It would be nice if you admired my lace," Ella said, "and spoke out about it."

"It's just lovely," his wife assured him.

"I guess you'd like some," he rejoined.

"I'd like the lot," she said.

"How much?" he asked Ella, putting his hand in his pocket.

Ella looked in the pleasant face, and, encouraged by what she saw there, doubled her price without hesitation.

He paid with the air of one who has made a good bargain. It was the first agreeable business dealing Ella had had, the only one from which she had come without a sense of humiliation, and she blessed those dear people. Some buyers are puffed up with the power to purchase, to a height of arrogance which would be fearsome if their bad manners did not at the same time let them down low by making them contemptible.

"Those Americans were so nice, so kind," Ella said more than once.

"But are not people always kind to you?" Adnam asked wondering.

"No, they are not," she answered decidedly, thinking of an interview she had had with Mrs. Pointz. "I did not know before that buyers could be so mannerly. And I did so dread hawking my lace! The very thought of it made me feel bedraggled. But I shan't feel so any more—in anticipation. It is a great discovery for me, that there are buyers I can respect."

"Those who respect you?" queried Adnam the shrewd.

"Precisely."

Just then the sound of a trap and fast trotting horse, gaining upon them rapidly from behind, became audible.

"Who cometh this way by stealth?" Ella whispered. The vehicle was abreast of them almost as she spoke. The driver pulled his horse up to a walk and Adnam recognised Melton. He was driving himself back to the Castle in a dogcart with a

groom behind, from a dinner-party, and, seeing the quaint Darby-and-Joan group on the horse in front of him had felt for a moment as if he had mistaken his century and wandered back into the end of the eighteenth.

"Oh—Adnam! That you?" he said, the inflection of his voice ranging from cordiality to dryness as the recognition of Ella followed quickly on his recognition of Adnam.

"A very noble knight, my lord," said Ella gaily, with the moonlight full upon her face. Melton had never seen her so animated before. "A noble knight who has just rescued a forlorn damsel from the perils of this lonesome road." Her words recalled to Adnam his own passing plunge into faërie.

"Lucky knight," Melton commented. "But may I not also have the honour to help in the rescue? See this seat beside me? It would be more comfortable, not to say more seemly, for the fair damsel than that jolting horse."

"What!" Ella exclaimed, "quit my noble knight for a seat in a dogcart? Never!"

"Safe home to you then," Melton flung at her, with a flick of his whip that shot his horse on ahead of them at a dangerous rate with the dogcart rocking behind him.

Melton's thoughts also flew fast. What was it to him? He had no intentions. But should he have had intentions? The right intentions keep off the wrong ones. Melton faced neither. He let himself drift. But what an exquisite face, exquisite always, but in the moonlight, when she laughed and looked happy like that, how transfigured! Of whom did she remind him? Some statue, some picture. He tried to fix the resemblance, but it escaped him. . . . Lucky knight! The dishonour of the whip descended again upon his spirited horse. The groom behind had to hold tight for his life. Afterwards, in the stableyard, as he rubbed the snorting animal down, he remarked to another man, who had been long in the service of the family, and was keeping his eye on him as a youngster, apt to shirk work: "'Is lordship 'e druv like the devil; an' all the way round by the Coastguard's Death too, i'stead o' comin' straight 'ome like a sober man. 'E give me a shakin' in me shoes, I can tell you. I thought 'e'd 'a' druv over."

"Well, it were after dinner," the older man said tolerantly. "Young bloods is apt to be a bit wild when they've dined."

"'E don't dine much that way, Lord Melton don't," the groom rejoined. "'E might 'a' bin mad, but 'e wasn't drunk. They say it's not wine wi' the Brabants, it's——"

"You shut up," his senior interrupted roughly and so missed food for conjecture. For the groom shut up for good and all on the subject. It was late, and he was too tired to see for himself that high-spiced suggestion was contained in the finished phrase, and must have come of it with a word on the night's rencontre.

Ella's hold on Adnam tightened in fear when Melton left them at breakneck speed. The charm was broken. For the rest of the time she scarcely spoke. The gallant horse, like the well-bred gentleman he was, having made up his mind to accept the position, kept up the best pace he could under his double burden without further show of ill-will, till they came close to Red Rose Farm. Here they met a man hurrying towards them.

"It's Robert," Ella cried; and then called, "Robert!"

He stopped short, and Adnam pulled up: "She's all right," he said.

"I'm thankful!" Robert exclaimed. "I've been down to Hallbin's. He was drunk. He could tell me nothing. I've been afraid for you, Ella."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said. "But I'm safe and sound, thanks to Adnam. I've had no trouble and I've got the money for mother." She slid down from the horse into Robert's arms as she spoke. "Good night," she said, shaking hands with Adnam; "and thank you a thousand times."

"Ay, thank you kindly," Robert said, in a voice that expressed all that the most perfect command of language could have conveyed.

Adnam missed her clinging arms about him as he rode away, but not for long. His horse, relieved of half his load, and finding himself in the near neighbourhood of his stable, for which he was now making direct, summoned fresh energy for a final spurt. There was intoxication in the pace; in the open moonlit spaces, and among the dark shadows; in the great round bright disc of the moon, low above the dark pine woods, sinking majestically; in the quickening freshness of the night air, salt-scented by the sea; above all in the soft full organ

note, the incessant sound in unison of the wind in the trees and the waves on the shore, overlaid by the rhythmic beat of the horse's hoofs, elusive, all-pervading. Adnam's spirits rose, they soared. His exaltation could not be contained. He stood in his stirrups, he bared his head, he sang:

*"Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works do praise Thy name, in earth,
and sky, and sea:
Only Thou art Holy, there is none beside Thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shall be."*

Adnam culled the words that best expressed what he felt, regardless of their position in the hymn, and filled the night with the glorious old tune triumphantly. His mother, wakeful because he had not returned, but not anxious, heard him and blessed heaven. If, instead of that song celestial, he had come back trolling some vulgar ditty; but, no—that would not have been Adnam, nor would silly sentiment either, in his strong clean youth.

It had been an eventful day, rich in novel experiences; a long chapter in a short life, and one which it might well be a pleasure to read again, if only because there was no blot upon it to deface the record. The meeting with the Perrys had given him much to think about. Their opinions, their busy, unpretentious, independent life, and their unaffected friendliness, were all very interesting and agreeable to him. "We must have been friends and had good times together in past incarnations," Mrs. Perry had said when they parted. "I feel that we are only renewing our old acquaintance. It is not like breaking new ground. We know each other quite well. And now we shall see each other often and often."

His mother, approving of what she heard of the Perrys, asked them to Pratt's Place, and the acquaintance rapidly ripened into an intimacy which had a very obvious influence on his subsequent views of life.

CHAPTER XV

At Castlefield Saye on Sunday morning the one bell of the village church made as much to-do as a peal. Instead of ringing dong, dong, dong, as if each dong were a stroke of doom, it went

*Tra la-la, tra la-la,
Tra la-la, la-la, la-la-la!*

merrily, as if to praise the Lord were a pleasant practice to which people attended with hearts made glad by the exercise. But few of the congregation realised that it might be so. There was nothing in religion, as they understood it, either to expand the heart or nourish the soul; no sacred mysteries to be entered into in spiritual ecstasy. They went to their religious exercises as to a duty, a dull duty, only made possible by persistent habit. The one thing they thought of with regard to the service was its length, and whether there would be the Litany or the Communion, or both. On days when there was only one or the other, they felt themselves let off, and enjoyed a sense of relief. If the tunes to be sung went with a good swing, they brightened up. The sermon found them resigned.

When the bell rang they accepted the invitation and went to church much as they accepted other invitations and for as many motives. It was the right thing to do, it was expected of them, it would do no harm if it did no good. Some ventured to say as much, but, at the same time, in every mind was the latent hope that it might do good—not hereafter; nobody ever really thought of hereafter except in the solemn crises of life, and for a moment—but here and now. It gave them a chance to go out and see other people, and made a pleasant break in the monotony of the week, and that was a good thing. Also there were Sunday clothes, the pleasure of wearing them, of showing them, and seeing other people's; all good things in their way because each contributed to a change of mind for the better, the most beneficial kind of change.

Nobody ever said anything about the act of worship. Their reserve on that subject was impenetrable. They were both afraid and ashamed to talk religion; if by chance it were alluded to, they changed countenance, as though the subject were indelicate. And that was what they felt it to be: one of the subjects not to be mentioned without embarrassment. If the joy of the outspoken bell had been articulate, they would have had it muffled for the indiscretion. In their attitude towards Sunday morning service, there was nothing in the least complex. The service was an occasion, and everybody in the neighbourhood attended it who could, from the duke and duchess, when they were in residence at the Castle, to the village wit. Why he went nobody at all understood; but, of course, with the village idiot it was different.

It was a pleasant sight on a fine Sunday morning to see the old Norman church, with its square, grey, ivy-mantled tower uplifted above the quiet graves, and the law-abiding peaceful people honouring the occasion with their best clothes, and with respect for the day written in the Sunday expression of their faces, congregating by every road that led to the church to take their weekly dose of cold religion for decency's sake. But it must not be inferred that they got no good from the observance. Good comes of every decent observance, good discipline, the trait which primarily distinguishes civilised man from the savage, and good manners, which mark the difference. The man who performed his Sunday observance regularly was sure to be self-respecting. He might take his glass of beer at the Brabant Arms, but he would never be caught disgracing himself in a low public-house; and the woman who was careful to have Sunday clothes of the best that she could afford would not stop short there in her efforts to deserve the good opinion of her neighbours. What help the people got from the service was in the discipline. And, for the good of their hearts, to expand them, there was the warm Sunday dinner at home, of which they always thought when there was mention of the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them. In fact, and for their reward, they found that, as an appetiser, there was nothing like going to church on Sunday morning.

Also their power to look up was kept alive. Though the ideal be not very high, it is something to have an ideal at all,

if it be only of a bonnet by which to correct our bad taste. To look up to anything by which we can improve ourselves is to aim at something better than ourselves, and our hope is in the aim; a good aim steadies us, a high aim helps us up. He who is no respecter of persons, and thinks himself as good as anybody, cannot aspire; his feet follow his eyes, and he keeps his eyes down. It is the respect we pay, and not the respect we receive, that proves our worth; the lower nature respects nothing. So, in church, the rough ignorant people, looking up to their "betters," gain by the act of looking up, even when their so-called "betters" have little to recommend them but their pretty manners; though these are worth much as an example to such as have yet to learn the value of pretty manners. The blond duchess was naturally the centre of attraction during the service at Castlefield Saye. The women used to peep at her discreetly, with never satisfied curiosity, and always with a strange wonder that she was a woman like themselves, and had to bring her children into the world in the same cruel way. They did not understand how near to the duchess this one fact brought them; but she did, and would smile and nod to mothers with babies about them, sympathetically, and show the kindest concern for wives with babies coming. She felt as a woman generally, and only remembered that she was a duchess when something—usually unpleasant—occurred, and reminded her of the dignity she had to stand on.

Although the distance was short, and she walked to church every Sunday when it was fine, the villagers always made a wonder of it. "So simple!" the coastguard officer's lady would say to the doctor's wife. And "just fancy, when she might come in a coach-and-six!" the village matrons would exclaim to each other, adding the extra pair to the usual coach-and-four to make the wonder the greater. And the duchess herself would say of them all, and of everything nice that she heard about them: "Aren't they dears? So human, you know!"

Things changed slowly at Castlefield Saye, and one of the things that had not suffered change as yet was the highbacked pews in the little old Norman church. The duchess said they were sweet in their old-fashioned quaintness, and because the duchess said they were "sweet," everybody said they were

"sweet"—except Mrs. Pratt, whose sense of duty to her family so far outweighed her respect for the duchess that she did not hesitate to correct Adnam, when he was a little boy, for calling the pews "sweet."

"Sugar tastes sweet," she said, "and flowers smell sweet——"

"When they don't smell nasty like garlic," Adnam interposed.

"Some flowers smell sweet, so flowers may smell sweet," Mrs. Pratt hastened to qualify; "but pews cannot smell sweet——"

"They would if they were scented," Adnam objected; "or if they were made of sandal or cedar or camphor wood."

Mrs. Pratt, accustomed by Adnam to debate everything, patiently conceded that this might be so, but then you would have to mention the fact when you spoke of such pews, because as pews were not generally made of sweet-scented wood, they would be an exception, therefore the adjective which would be applicable to them would not be applicable to the general run of pews: "And, at any rate, the pews in our church do not smell sweet," she insisted, with that slight increase of emphasis which comes of having had enough of the subject. "The pews are picturesque, if you like, and comfortable, and convenient, but sweet—no! Only stupid people use one word for everything."

"Then the duchess is stupid," Adnam concluded dispassionately.

Mrs. Pratt, in the stress of the discussion, had lost sight of this inevitable inference: "Oh, no," she hastened to correct him; "you must not call the duchess stupid."

"What then?" said Adnam, keenly interested.

"Well, you see," said Mrs. Pratt, not quite seeing herself, and fumbling about in her mind for an aspect of the truth—she was bringing Adnam up on the truth—which it would be safe to show him; "you see, the duchess was not taught to use many words when she was a child. It was not the custom then to teach little girls very much, but that does not prove that the duchess was stupid and could not learn. And what I want you to remember is that a man who has only one word on his tongue has only one idea in his head as a rule——"

"And a woman?" Adnam interrupted.

"Women are different," said poor Mrs. Pratt, driven to take refuge in the accepted formula on the duchess's behalf, although she knew that the difference did not lie in any difference of significance when it was a question of paucity of adjectives in either sex. She loved the little duchess, and was loyally devoted to her interests, but she had no illusions with regard to her.

On the Sunday morning following Adnam's interview with the squire, and his day in Closeminster, the bell was more gaily urgent than ever in its summons to church. It rang like a bell that was offering you the highest delight, as indeed it was. Bright weather shone upon the church. Shafts of sunlight slanted through the stained-glass windows, radiant in colour, but with varying effect—strangely here, grotesquely there; beautifying one person, making another ridiculous. It glinted on monuments and brasses and tombs of bygone Sayes, a family of which nothing but the name survived; and Brabants and Pointz' and Pratts; and on the dark oak of the old pews, which looked as if they had been piled up haphazard about the church with no other object than to afford the owner a good place of observation; and on the people as they slipped in, tip-toeing along the aisles as if it were by stealth that their purpose in coming could best be accomplished; and whatever the tinted light fell upon shone richly jewelled in transparent colour. There was a crimson tonsure on the bald head of the coastguard officer. The village midwife was robed in purple and red like an empress, a crown of glory adorned the broad back of the dressmaker, and the village wit only escaped being labelled Saviour of Men by dodging the monogram. No moral was suggested by Hallbin's blue nose, but there was significance in the livid green streak on the discontented face of Godiva Pointz, and appropriateness in the amber glow which irradiated the lovely figure in white of Beryl Blatchford, who sat among the Sunday school children, advertising her goodness and beauty with an amiable smile. There was no smile, as a rule, on the careworn face of her mother in the Rectory pew, with her six small children, whose heads rose one above the other in a restless row, and incessantly claimed her attention from her prayers. But that morning her eldest son, a young naval officer

at home on leave, sat beside her, and the proud-mother look had chased the habitual expression of patient endurance from her faded face and illuminated it. Her two first children were fine specimens, and she had reason to be proud of them, but the rest were a mistake, for which, however, she was to be pitied, not blamed, for she was a victim of the horrors of motherhood enforced on an exhausted woman.

Mrs. Blatchford had tried to make the most of herself on this occasion, that she might be pleasing in the eyes of her handsome son, a tender intention, deserving of more success than was possible with her figure.

She had a weakness for dress, which was continually at war with her sense of the reprehensibleness of vain display, especially in the helpmeet of a clergyman. That Sunday morning she had saved her conscience and brought her religious principles into relief by putting a hat on straight which was made to be worn with a tilt. The eccentric poise of this hat had a distracting fascination for the congregation. The women's eyes and thoughts continually returned to it. The suspicion that it might be "the right thing" of which they were unaware filled their hearts with doubt as to the proper attitude towards it, and interfered with their devotions. To ridicule "the right thing" is dangerous enough, but to approve of "the wrong thing" is to attach a label to your taste which you will never get rid of. Hence their difficulty.

The duchess, followed by Lady Ann, came into the church, and flickered, with much agitation of lace and ribbons, up the centre aisle to the family seats in the chancel, smiling impartially on everybody in general, and nobody in particular. She knelt for a brief space, then sat up, adjusted her lorgnette, and gazed about. The first thing she saw distinctly was Mrs. Blatchford's hat. "Good gracious!" said the duchess.

The rest of the Castle party came straggling in, the duke first. He had come by way of his model village, which it always did him good to see with the sunshine upon it. There had been some complaint of late of overcrowding. Families had outgrown the accommodation in their cottages, and were begging for additional rooms. The duke could well afford such additions, but proportion would have suffered, and the duke had an eye for proportion. The picturesqueness of the village was

dear to him, and so also was the comfort of his people. At the back of his mind was the feeling that they should have found comfort enough in the picturesque. Something was wrong with them evidently. He would inquire. It would be better to see into things a little more himself. He determined to do so, and signified his intention to Adam Hurst, whom he overtook in the village street. But Adam Hurst was on the side of the picturesque.

"That sort are never satisfied, your grace," he said. "What do they want? There were twelve of us in four rooms, and we'd all have grown up if it hadn't been for the fever year. Those as did live grew to be fine men and women."

"Ah! Survival of the fittest, and all that sort of thing," said the duke.

He walked into church with Adam Hurst, talking "quite free," and it did the people as much good to see them together as if their requests had all been attended to. When the father of a family is in a good humour everybody's spirits go up; and the duke was feudal father of this family.

Adam Hurst went to church regularly. He felt it to be a duty required of him by his eminent respectability. Also it was an easy and restful way of spending the time. If he had stayed at home Pettiblock would have made him work. Saturday night, when wages had been paid, was always a lively time at the Brabant Arms, and that made a deal of work on Sunday morning.

Melton and Eustace came next, together, looking so much alike at the first glance that a casual observer might have supposed that the only difference was in their height, Eustace being somewhat the shorter of the two. Whatever their private opinions on the subject of religion might be, the brothers never shirked church at Castlefield Saye. Their mother's genuine piety and their father's respect for outward decency had the effect of keeping them to the form at all events.

The Castle pew consisted of three rows of seats, rising one behind the other. The family scattered themselves about. The duke sat in one corner of the first row, the duchess in the other, the corners being most comfortable. Lady Ann sat next her mother. Eustace's seat was at the far end of the second row, Melton's in the corresponding seat behind, excellent posts

of observation. When guests were staying at the Castle they sat where they chose. Colonel Kedlock, coming in presently with his daughter, sat in the second row with Eustace, Lena being between them.

Colonel Kedlock was a dried up specimen. He resembled a fresh-looking man as a dried leaf resembles a green one. He had been good-looking in his youth, and still favoured the fashions that suited him then. He was the same age as the duke, but looked much older in his wrinkled dryness, although his hair was carefully kept of a youthful brown. He wore the side-whiskers and moustache which were admired in the sixties. There was a touch of rouge on his high cheek bones, a suspicion of powder in the crevices on either side of his high thin nose and in the network of crows' feet at the corners of his long narrow grey eyes. He was tall and lean and shrivelled, and his long wrinkled hands looked as if the juice had been dried out of them in the sun. His dress was dandified. Coat and trousers and white spats recalled the period when he was flourishing in his prime. He was happy in the delusion that, while his dress remained the same, there could be no marked change in the outward appearance of the man, and he had no suspicion that, to himself as a young man, he was as a dried prune is to a ripe plum. But, with it all, Colonel Kedlock looked like a gentleman, and this one fact mitigated criticism, and influenced the choice of adjectives to describe him, kindly. He was "a fine old boy," "one of the olden time," "so quaint, you know," and "quite delightfully old-fashioned," according to the age and sex of the friends who mentioned him. By his enemies, of course, he was not so good-naturedly designated.

The Brabants and he were connections by marriage, his wife having been a cousin of the duke. The story was that he had once had estates of his own, which the duke had won from him at cards in their youth, and had afterwards restored, which story, as it happened, was true. But the duke's generosity was not of much avail, for Colonel Kedlock again staked all he had, piecemeal, to other opponents, until all was lost; and then the duke, taking pity on him in his destitution, had made him his agent, a step which he had never had cause to regret, for although Colonel Kedlock was a gambler with his own, he was scrupulous with regard to the duke's property;

which was strange enough, for in that alone was he scrupulous. It would be nice to say that his redeeming characteristic was his disinterested affection for his only child, his daughter. Unfortunately he had no disinterested affection for his daughter. He had kept her shut up in a convent in France as an encumbrance until he discovered that she had become a fascinating young person, who might be a valuable asset in experienced hands, and his intention was to turn her to profitable account.

The Pratts also had a family pew. They were the oldest family in the neighbourhood, and it had been theirs before the Brabants came. They arrived early in church that morning. Ursula sat between her son and husband, Old Emery's handsome person, built to endure in use for a hundred years, making a grateful shelter to her fragile grace. Seraph sat on his father's right, and fidgeted, hunching his shoulders one minute, straightening himself the next, affecting preoccupation with his prayer book, but with eyes that rapidly glanced from right to left, spying about furtively to discover if perchance he was being observed to the extent his self-conscious vanity required for its satisfaction. Certainly the young ladies in the squire's pew looked his way, but then they could not lift their eyes without looking his way, so that hardly counted. Seraph had begun to take a special interest in Godiva, the eldest daughter, and he flattered himself that she knew it and did not object.

Adnam, on his mother's right, was frankly observant. He was near enough to catch the duchess's exclamation, and had looked about for something to account for it. Failing to find anything, Mrs. Blatchford's hat not being visible from where he sat, his eyes returned to the Castle pew. Lena had taken her seat by that time. Her attitude in church was always a surprise to Adnam. It seemed to his ignorance of the complexity of human nature so utterly inconsistent with what he knew of her. He tried not to look at her now, dreading some indiscretion on her part, but her near neighbourhood disturbed him. He tried to interest himself in other people as they entered, but he had to think of her. Would she make an impertinent signal? She was bold enough if she chose, and likely enough to choose—so he imagined. He could fancy the dark eyes, bright and liquid as gems, meeting his with wicked intel-

ligence, the red lips quivering with suppressed laughter—oh! she was outrageous! But, all the same, he had to look. This time he was sure that he knew what to expect, and he meant to disconcert her with a blank stare and stop her nonsense. But this time, as on every other occasion when he had seen her in church, he was entirely out in his expectations. She was looking towards him certainly, looking right at him or right through him, for she did not see him. There was a rapt expression on her face, the absorbed expression of the devotee, uplifted in spirit, lost to all consciousness of the visible world. She had to thank the poor nuns for that. They had given her access to the highest delight. They had taught her how to pray. Adnam, with a contrite heart, again wiped out his first impression and revised his whole opinion of her. He did this every time he saw her in church.

Girls were a sensation to Adnam, a pleasant sensation; but they had not got into his head as yet. They do not get early into the head of a young man who is bound to succeed in life. It is out of sight out of mind with him, although, when they are within hail, they may affect him agreeably. A young man who takes to kissing before he has settled down to the practical business of life is seldom much good. He has upset the natural course of his development. Adnam was taking everything regularly and in order. With him it was business before pleasure; he had no use for girls as a diversion just then. He did not dream. He thought and he felt. Music, and nature in her heavenly mood—all forms of beauty—stirred him deeply; but he built no castles in the air; he made plans upon earth; laid them down like rails, on which he expected to run, as smoothly as might be, to his destination. He used imagination only as the scientist uses it, speculating as the scientist speculates, collecting facts and sorting them impartially, in proof or disproof of his suppositions, as the case might be. Three girls in the church that morning attracted his attention. Beryl Blatchford, who, in her white dress, with the tinted glow of the sunshine irradiating her fair prettiness, pleased him, as a golden-haired girl with the limelight on her in a play would have pleased him, or a work of art. They had been near neighbours all their lives, had met at children's parties, joined in the same games, and kept up a bowing acquaintance; but, except on

occasions of ceremony, Adnam had never spoken to Beryl, and never wished to. His feeling for Madelena Kedlock was more complex. She was his first experience in that sort of scamp of a girl, but, in his young charity, he thought no ill of her. She was just a scamp, who deserved to be shaken occasionally. He had not suspected that there might be a serious side to her nature until he saw her attitude in church, consequently he had not taken her seriously. But he had given her a trifle more thought, or, to speak accurately, she had aroused more feeling in him than any other girl so far had succeeded in arousing, but it was transitory. With Ella Banks it was just the reverse. He could only take her seriously. And of late he had experienced a certain sort of indefinite expectation with regard to her. He recognised that there was more in her than in the others, more to be expected of her, and dimly foresaw that more must happen to her. He knew this subconsciously, his mind working involuntarily on little incidents that seemed to concern her, trying to piece them together so as to understand—to foresee. But to what end? He did not ask himself. If life has a destined course, what is the use of foreseeing? And if life has no destined course, there can be nothing to foresee. So some might have argued and been content to think that the answer either way must ease them of all responsibility. But Adnam did not know enough at that time to argue at all on the subject. Latent in him was the belief that each of us has a destiny, but not all ready prepared for him: not a destiny determined by heredity or any other irresistible power, but a destiny in embryo—the embryo being his to develop, well or ill, for himself; the means being action. He acted on this latent belief instinctively, in the concentrated effort he was making to shape his own destiny, and he knew that Ella was doing the same; but he had less faith in her power to succeed than in his own. A girl has greater risks to run and difficulties to surmount than a man. Men are magnanimous to each other. They have arranged the world so that their own mistakes are forgiven them, but there is no forgiveness for the woman. Men make her their scapegoat, not in justice, but because she is defenceless, and it is safe and easy to drive her out into the wilderness to suffer for all. “I have sinned,” man says, “punish the woman.” So it was, at least, while women were passive.

Now that they have begun to show fight for themselves, it is neither so easy nor so safe. Besides, there are good men, whose souls sicken at the cruelty, who would rather suffer unjustly than be unjust; a new and manlier generation, who are beginning to open their eyes; who loathe the hypocrisies of self-interest, and scorn to knock women down in order to make their own escape. These say: "Let us help each other." To bear one another's burden is chivalry; there is no other; and the man who is not chivalrous is a cur. High thought spreads from its centre and becomes an influence in the air to which many are susceptible. This is why Adnam tried involuntarily to foresee. Innate in him, as in all brave natures, when danger threatens another, was the impulse to help, to save. A noble knight, unconsciously preparing for the Divine Adventure, Adnam was watching, on guard.

The service was waning to its close. The last hymn before the sermon had been sung:

*Our Blest Redeemer, ere he breathed
His tender last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter, bequeathed
With us to dwell.*

This was a favourite hymn. The mixed choir of men and women in the organ-loft sang it with pleasure, and the congregation joined in at their ease. Familiarity has its own appeal in such matters, and they had known the hymn all their lives. For this reason, perhaps, very few of them attached any special meaning to the words. Had there been a discussion on the subject, they would have emphatically protested their belief in the promise of a Comforter, but nobody relied upon it to the extent of expecting its literal fulfilment. It ranked in their minds with other events which are indefinitely postponed by the imagination, as, for instance, death, which must come and may come at any moment, but is seldom thought of and never really expected till it appears in sight. In the sorrowful some vague hope of possible comfort might be stirred, but more by the music than the words. The old plaintive tune produced a gentle melancholy, wholly pleasurable, but of short duration.

In the act of settling themselves for the sermon, it lost its hold upon them.

The people settled down, each after his or her own kind. Seraph Pratt folded his arms and prepared to enjoy a happy release from the sense of his own identity, in sleep. His father bent his brows in a respectful effort to give the pulpit his best attention. Colonel Kedlock sat upright, eyes left, aiming at the parson. Seen so, he was calculated to attract attention. Indeed, when they were together, and there was a doubt as to which was which, it was always Colonel Kedlock who was mistaken for the duke. Beryl Blatchford posed for effect, and built castles in the air, full of young men of means and position, all singularly handsome fighting men, ready to die for her. Godiva Pointz, grown disconsolate since Seraph had shut his eyes, rehearsed old grievances against her mother, whom she despised. Lena Kedlock, sitting beside Eustace Brabant, slipped her hand into his. He gave it a friendly little squeeze, and returned it to her. Then she half turned her back and leant against him, secure from observation behind the high front of the pew. He folded his arms and stuck out an elbow to keep her as far off as possible. Eustace had his father's respect for appearances, but that was all he dared do by way of remonstrance. He was afraid of irritating her lest worse should come of it. Had he repulsed her altogether she would probably have argued the point and made a disturbance. It was a need of her nature to caress and be caressed. Whatever her pleasure of the moment, whether spiritual or merely æsthetic, it would have been incomplete without the kind of physical satisfaction derived and also expressed by a cat when it rubs up against you. As a child leans against its mother and is content, so she leant against Eustace now, and, promptly forgetting the source of her content, gave herself up to contemplation.

All eyes were raised to the rector as he gave out the text, and on him most of them remained while they were open. To look at him during the sermon was an understood part of the proceedings, wherever your thoughts might be; and those who let their eyes wander did so discreetly by taking all expression of interest out of them which might have entailed the reproach of looking about in church. Now and then a sentence from

the pulpit, impressively delivered, quickened attention, arousing some, recalling others from their own thoughts, or what they mistook for their own. For, thought being a kind of wireless telegraphy passing incessantly from mind to mind, each mind making and receiving involuntarily such impressions as its own limitations and attitude allows, mistakes must be made as to the right ownership of many a thought. How strange and interesting would a glimpse be of the effect produced by the wandering thoughts, passing, criss-cross, from one to another, of such seemingly attentive quiet congregations! Here was a subject for a sermon if only the preacher had known it! A lesson rooted in self-interest, the most moving of reasons, to persuade people to set a watch upon their minds, both as to what goes out from them and as to what comes in. He might have shown them the thought which is a dangerous intruder, the mean thought which, reaching a generous mind, jars on its sensitive fairness; the ill-natured unlovely thought, which, invading a mind passive for the moment and therefore prone to receive impressions, infects it with the poison of an evil communication. He might have counselled them that, when a thought struck them, if it were a low thought, they should oust it instantly, and strike back with another of a nobler nature by way of antidote.

The suggestion would have astounded Mr. Blatchford. He was on quite a different tack. "When you entertain your friends——" he was saying.

The words, falling from him in a conversational tone, caught the duchess napping, and roused her to the recollection of certain social duties she was inclined to neglect. She was under the erroneous impression that she hated her social duties. What she imagined she liked best was to be alone at the Castle with her family and some few friends, a dozen or so, intimate enough not to be exacting in the way of attention. As a matter of fact, she would have been a lost woman without her social duties. Her mental health depended upon the constant change and variety they brought into her life, and she was happy enough in the performance of them. It was only the anticipation from which she winced, as she was wincing now from the prospect of having a number of tiresome people to stay. But they had to be asked. And the duchess no sooner acknowledged

to herself the necessity, than she began to feel the benefit of it in a sudden alertness aroused by the appetite for mental refreshment which was stimulated by the chance of obtaining it. There was a dinner-party pending at Pointz to which, however, she did not look forward with pleasure. The duchess did not like Mrs. Pointz. It was good form to be pious in that neighbourhood because the duchess was pious, and Mrs. Pointz was one of those people who would be cannibals if the example were set them by a sufficiently exalted personage. She aped the duchess's piety, but hers was of that severely observant kind which is ever alive to the faults of others. There was none of the weakness of loving-kindness in her outlook upon life or her criticisms. She did not believe in raising people's estimate of themselves or of each other. She held that praise only fosters conceit, and was not afraid of the discouraging effect of blame. In all that she said of other people, and she talked mostly about other people, there was the ominous note of detraction, ominous of a bad nature. All the same, it was not character that influenced her estimate of people, but social position. Upon social position she set an extravagant store, because, before her marriage she had had none. She was known in Society as "Fustian from the North."

The squire inherited his property just at the time when wheat had ceased to pay "because of those *blamed* Radicals," and the landowners were throwing up their hands in despair. Great tracts of land were allowed to go out of cultivation, although a variety of profitable crops might have been grown on them if only the owners could have got wheat out of their heads and other ideas into them. One here and there managed the feat, but these were practical men like Emery Pratt, in whose blood was the wholesome tradition that a man must work or be only half a man. The rival dignities of Labour and Leisure might have been tested for their value by a comparison between the adjoining estates of Pratt's Place and Pointz; the one with every rood of land made to pay, the other going to rack and ruin; but the object lesson was lost upon Pointz. The leisure class was trying various expedients to raise money to keep up the dignity of leisure, among which to marry an heiress was the most popular, and it was in that way that Squire Appleton Pointz had felt himself bound to prop up

his tottering finances; consequently he went where money was, and met his doom. She was a black-haired beauty of eighteen and an heiress as well, and he thought himself in luck. Money and a handsome maid; what more could man desire? For the rest he trusted to luck. Like most young men, he did not speculate about what the handsome maid might become when her mind had had time to do its worst with her. Her reverence for position made her diffident during their courtship, and she had only occasionally shown anything of herself that jarred upon him, and of that little he flattered himself she would soon be cured under his influence. The sordid defects of her character he mistook for the superficial result of her environment, the reflection merely of an unfortunate example. He expected her to lose all that was objectionable when he got her away and so placed that there was nothing but what was good to reflect. So they were married, and he was disappointed, both in her and her money. Every trait that most offended him in a woman she developed, and her money did not go half far enough. And she was disappointed too. For she had taken him to get rid of the trademark; but, in her case, unfortunately, the trademark persisted. Not that anybody would have minded the trademark if she had not minded it so much herself. Her attitude towards it acted like a fresh coat of paint on a half obliterated signboard. If she had let it alone people would have forgotten all about it. As it was they felt it to be a stigma, because she so evidently thought it so herself. Her ignorance of the rudiments of the "form" she aped came out in her incessant talk about "us" and "we," "Society" and "people in our position," and made it impossible to forget that she was an interloper. It was not to the trademark but to Mrs. Pointz's effort to conceal it that the little duchess objected. She had several friends with the trademark upon them whom she valued, but then, in their case, there was no assumption. There the trademark was and they never troubled about it, either to boast of it with arrogant self-assertion or to deny its existence with equally vulgar as well as vain deceit—the two stools between which people on their promotion socially are apt to fall.

The workings of a mean mind are disastrous to health and beauty. Mrs. Pointz was tall and had been prettily plump in

her youth, but in the course of years, by steeping herself in bitterness, she had grown gaunt, had early powdered her black hair with pepper and salt, and had made bad blood enough to spoil her own life, with plenty to spare for transmission to her children.

"Mrs. Pointz is not a pleasant person," was the little duchess's mental comment now, when she thought of the Pointz dinner-party in prospect.

Doors and windows were open and the sweet scented air filled the little church. There was sunshine without and the hush that falls on the land at noon. All the influences made for dreamful ease, even the voice from the pulpit, the stream of words. Like the babble of a brook on a hot still day, they reached the ear without disturbing the mind, and, mingling with the many-toned dreamy murmur, which is the voice of nature, that entered from without, added to the sense of soothing. It was a delicious interval, very restful to tired workers and to the old and weary, by reason of the release from care that came upon them with the passivity their attitude induced. As the tension relaxed, and their hearts expanded, they rejoiced in the good they got by coming to church.

The duke, fingering his vestige of a whisker as if to make sure that the precious relic was safe—a habit he had—listened for awhile.

"There is a positive right and wrong," said the preacher, "and no man can go through life without knowing the one from the other." The duke's attention flagged, his eyes wandered. They rested on Godiva Pointz. There were ugly blotches on her face, an unhealthy sign, which for a moment stirred in the duke a feeling of compassion. He was kindly disposed towards all young girls, and they in return were devoted to the duke. His glance passed on from Godiva to Beryl Blatchford. She was no longer irradiated by the amber glow, but her hair shone as if the sun had left his light upon it. The duke considered her, appreciated her beauty, but was not satisfied. There was something wanting, what was it? He looked at Ella Banks, who was in church for a wonder; she found the open air more profitable as a rule for rest and refreshment after a hard week's work. The contrast of character was as evident in the two girls as the contrast of colouring.

Beryl's self-consciousness was betrayed by the changes of expression that flickered upon her face. Self-consciousness is the outcome of anxiety, rooted in doubt and fear. Beryl, anxious to attract, was doubtful of her power; and the fear of failure drove her to make efforts which frustrated her object by revealing it. Ella Banks had very little thought of herself at any time, and no doubt. She had her objects too, but she had the courage to make for them direct. Ella was strong, and conscious of her strength, though the source of it was a mystery to her. It is the self-contained who become charged with magnetic power, unconsciously collected and stored. In the calm, the quiet, the unbroken silence of the long hours spent at her work, the force came to Ella, and was preserved by her habitual composure. She was absorbed in thought as she sat there now, looking straight before her. The light behind her showed the red tint in her black hair. There was health in her well-developed figure, in the white transparency of her cheeks, in the carmine of her lips—health of body; and, in the self-contained composure of her easy attitude, both health and strength of mind. The duke saw in her all that he missed in Beryl Blatchford, and was satisfied. His eyes rested long upon her. Melton also, leaning a little forward in his seat, was looking at her, and so was Algernon Pointz. Adnam was looking at Melton.

Suddenly the preacher roared, "Be sure." "Be sure," he reiterated, "be sure your sin will find you out!"

The congregation started to attention. Some few remembered their own misdeeds. Little boys became aware of the nefarious contents of their pockets, little girls flushed at the recollection of sundry surreptitious doings; but, generally speaking, each, young and old, thought only of their neighbour's danger, and prepared for the worst.

"Be sure your sin will find you out!"

It was as if the threat had touched a spring that shot the duke's eyes to Adam Hurst. Adam was looking at the duke. But the trained manservant in him triumphed. His countenance was a blank.

"Quite a good sermon," the duchess afterwards remarked to everyone she met. "So rousing, you know."

CHAPTER XVI

THE congregation did not scatter immediately after morning service at Castlefield Saye. Those in a position to have their midday meal seen to for them lingered about the graveyard as they came out of church, and greeted each other with the mixed expression of self-approval and diffidence on their faces which is so peculiarly Protestant; a bashful, apologetic sort of expression, as if they were half ashamed to have been caught in the act of worship. After the greetings they sorted themselves and went off in family parties to their respective abodes, and what each had said and observed of the others became the principal topics of conversation for the rest of the week.

The plump little duchess stumped out first on her high-heeled shoes, her narrow little feet looking not half large enough to support the weight of the protuberances bulging above them, and rendered specially conspicuous by the careless way she grabbed up her dress and drew it tight round her. Nodding and smiling to everybody she made direct to Ursula Pratt, to whom she had always something more or less inconsequent to say. Old Emery and his sons took off their hats to her as she approached, and then stepped aside that they might not overhear the inconsequence. Beryl Blatchford and Godiva Pointz, expecting admiration from the two young men, and anxious to give them a chance to stare their fill, greeted each other with effusion, affecting absorbing interest in each other and perfect unconsciousness of any attention that they might attract. Adnam's slow glance wandering over the group was undecipherable. Seraph showed the interest he felt in Godiva Pointz, and Godiva, aware of the interest, in no way resented it, although she was the squire's eldest daughter, Miss Pointz of Pointz, and Seraph was only the eldest son of a well-to-do yeoman. Marriageable men being scarce in that neighbourhood had acquired a fictitious value, and the fact of being rare was enough in itself to make them dear. Seraph's sloping shoulders and furtive gait would have ruled him out of the running had there been more choice, but

Godiva balanced his height against his defects and excused them.

The duke and duchess always had a happy moment on these occasions with their own people, in whose salutes there was affection as well as respect. A duke can be agreeable without much trouble. A word here, a nod there, your hat off with a smile to a woman, and a pleasant expression for every one, is quite enough. Even other dukes are pleased with you as a credit to their caste if you greet them pleasantly. The duchess greatly admired her husband amongst his people, and thought it delightful to be able to give so much pleasure at so small a cost. She did much more of that kind of thing for people herself than he did, but never realised it, for the pathetic part of good-nature is that the good-natured souls, from excess of selflessness, rarely have a share in the satisfaction they give. Where the duchess scored was in her happy, childlike absence of self-consciousness, and there she had greatly the advantage of the duke. For, unlike the duchess, who seldom remembered that she was a duchess, the duke seldom forgot that he was a duke, strive as he would. He was naturally debonair, but a liberal sprinkling of "By jove, sir," to this one, and "Egad, sir," to that, did not alter the set of his head. He held it too high. And the manner of his holding was curiously suggestive both of that species of dignity which has been described as a mysterious carriage of the body to cover defects of the mind, and of the consciousness of rank. The attitude is common enough. And never can the man who falls into it habitually, either forget his own position or make others forget it.

Lena Kedlock's wicked dark eyes from beneath the shadow of her curly fair hair followed the duke with animation. She and Eustace Brabant had come together after church like needle and magnet. "What are you—er—looking so hard at?" Eustace asked.

"Your father—keeping up the dignity of the peerage."

"You—er—seem to—er—forget that he is my father," Eustace huffily answered her impertinence.

"I don't—er," she contradicted, shamelessly mimicking his difficult enunciation. "The—er—fact—adds much to your other attractions in my opinion."

When she had spoken, she darted away, and Eustace, turning to look for the cause of her flight, found Algernon Pointz at his elbow.

"That Blatchford filly is a fine girl of the type," Algernon remarked. "The sort of girl one waits for till she's another man's wife, though. Eh, what?"

Eustace left the fellow in disgust. Algernon made for Lena and caught her, though she tried to avoid him. Smarting from the snub Eustace had given him, he was prepared to vent his ill-humour upon her.

"So you gave me away," he said.

"I gave you fair warning," she retorted.

"Just like a woman!" he ejaculated. "You'd give any one away. You never play fair."

"I never played at all with you," she exclaimed. "I don't like your game."

"Oh, by way of being witty, eh?" he sneered.

"You told your father I'd lied." She watched the effect of her words. "And he didn't believe you."

"How do you know?" slipped from Algernon incautiously.

"Thank you," she said. "I wanted to know. Seems you give yourself away when there's nobody else to do it."

"You *have* a tongue!" he reproached her.

She put it out at him, and was caught in the act by Adnam, who flushed apoplectically in the stress of a hurried effort to re-adjust his newly adjusted opinion of her. Lena, catching his eye, winked one of her own. Adnam turned his back on her. The mischief seemed pleased at this result. She looked about her, and saw Mrs. Blatchford's hat. To do a good deed was as natural to Lena as to be hoydenish.

"Oh, Mrs. Blatchford," she said, "excuse me. How careless of Beryl. She should have seen that your hat is on wrong. Do please allow me to be your daughter for the moment and set it right. There! that's the proper tilt. Now you look bonny. It was enough, as you had it, to spoil the prayers of the congregation."

"I—I am much obliged to you," Mrs. Blatchford faltered, not at all sure that Lena had been doing her a kindness. "What has she done to my hat?" she asked her son when Lena left her.

"I don't know," he said vaguely. "But she's made it look awfully jolly. I didn't half like it before."

Mrs. Pointz, aiming at the duke, had caught Colonel Kedlock, who greeted her with the fatuous exaggeration of deference peculiar to the days when women could hear themselves styled "the fair sex," and that sort of thing, without laughing.

"Fine sermon," he said, suiting his discourse to the shadow of the church in which they stood. The old grey tower contemplated Colonel Kedlock without visible emotion, although it had not seen many queerer things during the long centuries of its steadfast vigil. The wrinkles came and went like forked lightning on his face as he spoke, with every fleeting change of expression. "That text—er—" he had forgotten the text—"that text—er—is one of my favourites."

"Mr. Blatchford's sermons are never much to my mind," Mrs. Pointz snapped, nose in air. "I do not like his tone. It is not respectful to Us. He does not discriminate between Us and the lower orders. We have our faults, but he should clearly distinguish them. The faults of the lower orders are very different. They are a lower order of faults. But he might be a Radical and a leveller for any distinction he makes in his teaching."

"Ah, now, my dear lady," Colonel Kedlock rejoined, making play with the forked lightning wrinkles all over his face in a gay attempt at a winning smile; "are you not a little hard on the poor gentleman? What you disapprove is merely the reaction from Mrs. Blatchford."

Of the two Colonel Kedlock preferred Mrs. Blatchford, but it was his custom to administer balm and oil to the one lady at the expense of the other.

Mrs. Pointz sniffed and looked about her. Both ladies were stalking the duchess, and it appeared to Mrs. Pointz that Mrs. Blatchford was gaining on her. The duke in an effort to avoid Mrs. Pointz had been caught at a disadvantage by Mrs. Blatchford, who presented her son Vincent, just home on leave.

"Ah, nice boy," said the duke. "Quite a man, eh? I remember you a baby. Navy, isn't it? Fine service! You must come and see us. If I can do anything for him, you know, Mrs. Blatchford—. Excuse me. There's the squire."

The radiance kindled in the poor mother by the few abrupt but kindly words was surely set down to the duke's credit by

the recording angel, particularly as he meant what he said. He had a liking for the simple lady. It was Mrs. Pointz and her manner, which grew oppressive in proportion to the sense she had of the dignity of the personage she addressed, whom he abominated: "Confound the woman!" he had been known to exclaim in disgust. "If she speaks to me like that, how will she speak to her Maker when she meets Him?"

The squire was talking to Emery Pratt when the duke joined them.

"What's all this Adnam's been telling me, Pratt?" the squire was saying.

Old Emery, large and laconic, looked down on the squire benevolently: "What's Adnam been telling you, squire?" he asked.

"That business of his the other night," said the squire, testily.

"I know nothing of his business the other night," Pratt answered.

"What," the squire yapped, "did he come to me without consulting you?"

"He's of age, squire," Pratt reminded him.

"And has inherited his estates, I suppose," the squire took him up. Like most ill-nourished people, he was apt to be irascible.

"Started in business for himself," Emery corrected him stolidly. "And Adnam's by way of minding his own business," he added.

"Like his mother," the duke observed casually, just catching Adnam's name.

Emery, not being aware of any business in which his lady was engaged, except the business of being his wife, looked puzzled.

"In appearance, you know," said the duke. He admired Mrs. Pratt, but only since Emery had carried her off from under his roof, and it was always a matter of surprise and regret to him that he had not noticed before how desirable she was. Not that he was a dirty bird, but a certain *prestige* attaches to the discoverer. Only one here and there is a discoverer, and it is he who forms public opinion, upon which the taste of the ruck of mankind is based.

Emery glanced at his son by way of reply.

"What is this business he has taken up?" the duke asked.

"He's taken up twelve acres to cultivate for his own benefit," Pratt answered.

"Ah," said the duke pleasantly. "Small holding business, and all that sort of thing, I suppose."

Emery let him suppose so.

The squire was going to say something about new-fangled notions, which would have been destructive of the supposition, but just then he caught the commanding eye of his wife, and hurried off to her obediently.

The little duchess was taking leave of Ursula. "I must go, dear," she said. She beckoned to Ann and Lena. "Come, children!" Then to Ursula confidentially: "I must *fly* or I shall have the Pointz person down on me again. Look, she's waiting at the gate with Godiva and the squire, ready to swoop. And their carriage hasn't come yet. When it's late I know she means to be asked to lunch. And I'm so weak-minded I always ask her. I can't help it. She *makes* me."

"Oh, *please* don't go yet," Lena pleaded. "We may have some fun again. You weren't there that day, Mrs. Pratt, when she upbraided her coachman for being late—old Roberts, you know—and he took out his watch and showed it to her, and said it was just on the stroke of the time she'd told him to come. And she got into a rage and gave him notice before us all. And he touched his hat, and said, 'Thank you, ma'am. It's not legal to give notice of a Sunday, but I'll take it to oblige you. I'd always lived with the gentry before you took me in, and I want to get back to 'em. I can't abide the manners of the lower classes.'"

"You naughty child!" the duchess exclaimed, exchanging a look of amusement with Ursula. "You mustn't gossip. You know I always set my face against gossip."

"We all do," said Lena piously. "But this is history I'm telling you. I bet you don't know why Roberts stayed at Pointz after all."

"Do you?" said the duchess.

"Yes. I got it out of Roberts with a quart of beer and a dash of gin in it, when I was staying at Pointz. The gin did the trick."

"Did the trick!" the duchess repeated, admonishing her. "Lena, how can you use such language!"

Lena pretended to sulk. The duchess fluttered her little hands about. She was aching with curiosity. Lady Ann came to the rescue.

"Do tell us, Lena," she said.

"How can I if I'm to be snubbed for every word?" Lena pouted. "Everybody knows that I haven't had your advantages, and they make me pay for it."

"Dear child," said the duchess remorsefully, "I don't want to make you pay—suffer—for it. I only want to help you. You *know* that."

Lena's irresistible smile appeared. "I know you're the dearest, kindest, sweetest duchess in the world, and I'm horrid. Well, I'll try and tell you in English if I can—Roberts's English. 'I stayed out o' pity,' he said. 'I'm good 'earted, I am, an' I don't like to see the squire put upon.'"

"Lena, you shouldn't," said the duchess. "It is not nice."

"'No 'arm so long's yer good 'earted.'"
Lena mimicked Roberts. "I wouldn't say a word against auntie for the world. I always think, when she comes to see you, if only she curtsied when she entered the room, stood with her hands respectfully folded over that flat space in front of her, while you talked to her and then went off to have tea in the housekeeper's room, where she'd be at her ease and really happy, she'd be quite nice."

This sally provoked an exchange of amused glances with Mrs. Pratt, which the duchess would have followed up with the inevitable rebuke had not her attention been diverted just then by the arrival of the carriage from Pointz. She watched Mrs. Pointz get in, followed by Godiva and the squire, and drive off, then threw up her eyes and fluttered her hands in mute thanksgiving, a gesture which Lena, in the background, imitated exactly. The coast being clear, the duchess led the way from the open space in front of the church down the steep broad walk to the gates, a scrap of her dress held up in her hand, the rest trailing after her. Becoming aware of Mrs. Blatchford with her son among the graves, patiently waiting for a word, the little lady took pity on her pefunctorily.

"Oh, Mrs. Blatchford! How do you do?" she exclaimed. "Quite a fine sermon to-day, so rousing, you know. You must tell the good rector I said so, and express my thanks. And Vincent home again? Why, you're quite a man! Don't you know Le—— Miss Kedlock? I'll introduce you. You must come and lunch with us to-morrow. Where is Beryl? Beryl the Beautiful, I call her. How is the good rector?" She waved her hand to Ursula, who was going down a narrow path to a side gate followed by her husband and their sons. "Good-bye, Mrs. Blatchford. I do hope the good rector is well. Come, children, we're keeping everybody waiting," and she hurried off down the path, chattering all the way. "Ridiculous name, Beryl," she remarked. "And Godiva! That sort of person always chooses such names. Thank goodness they leave us Sarah and Ann and Mary and Elizabeth——. Why, there's Algernon Pointz. How do you do?"

Lena fled. At the gate she found Eustace waiting for her, and seized his hand. The duke and Colonel Kedlock were strolling on ahead.

"Your mother's fallen into the clutches of the Blond Beast," Lena said. "We shall have him for lunch." She ran on up the hill, dragging Eustace along with her. "Hurry up," she panted. "I must overtake Paternal Relative. There's a matter of business to be settled between us."

Algernon was bowing low over the duchess's hand. "I am not doing at all well at this moment," he answered her inquiry. "I've been left behind, and I shall be late for luncheon, and that means trouble at Pointz."

"You must come back with us," the hospitable little lady insisted cordially.

That was what he had intended, having missed the carriage on purpose. He thanked the duchess, pulled his heavy blond moustache, and gazed into Ann's eyes sentimentally. Ann blushed very prettily, and he looked at her again with real interest. She was a delicate little piece of plumpness, fair haired, pink and white as the finest porcelain, with tender blue eyes; ignorant of all evil, and unsuspecting as only the ignorant can be—a flower of a girl, with no more power to protect herself from harm than a flower of the field. Algernon shot another glance at her and his own colour rose. An idea

had come to him. He was impecunious, and in debt, and the Brabants were rich. Lady Ann would have a fortune presumably. He took fire at the thought. Lady Ann realised that he was looking at her ardently, as no man had ever looked at her before. Her little heart began to flutter. It must be so that lovers look. She had read about their burning glances. Her eyes fell; she could not raise them again; but she could see him all the same, transfigured by the glow of her feelings.

"You must be glad to be at home again," the duchess was saying.

"Ah, home!" he sighed. "There are homes and homes."

He glanced up at the Castle wistfully. The duchess understood that there he saw the ideal home.

"That is true," she answered feelingly.

"Some rare natures are richly gifted in that way," he said. "They make it home wherever they are. Some——" He shook his head and sighed again.

The duchess felt herself to be one of the gifted persons.

"You have a charming old house," she reminded him by way of comfort.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "But what is a house? A house is not everything."

"True," she agreed. "But we can all do something."

"Yes—our best," he answered impressively.

This edifying conclusion had the effect of a moral tonic on the duchess. She was quite glad she had asked him to lunch. She had heard things about him, but young men have many temptations, and there are always ill-natured people ready to make the most of every little slip. She was certain that there must be plenty of good in him, otherwise he could not have spoken so charmingly, or alluded so delicately to the troubles of his home life. Everybody knew that it was a troubled home life. Poor young fellow, so handsome too! He only wanted a little help. And what help could he get from that coarse person at Pointz? The duchess determined to help him herself.

The duke was drawing something on the ground with his stick for Colonel Kedlock's information, when Lena and her victim overtook them. He had an idea for an improvement in the view from one side of the Castle, and went on explain-

ing it until the rest of the party came up. They all walked on together.

Lena's business with her father was a matter of money. She had tried in vain by fair means to induce him to give her some; now she had resolved to finesse.

"I must walk with my dad," she said, discarding Eustace without ceremony.

Colonel Kedlock looked gratified by this symptom of filial devotion: "And what did my girlie do with herself while her old dad was away yesterday?" he asked in a tone which should have been matched by a tear in his eye, so feelingly affectionate was it.

"Met a pretty young man in a wood, Paternal Relative," the scamp replied with characteristic effrontery, post-dating the episode with Adnam to suit her wicked convenience.

"And what did girlie do then?" the affectionate father proceeded unsuspectingly, speaking clearly so that the whole party might be edified.

"Same as Paternal Relative did when he met Mary the Maid at the stile by the brook the other day. My corner window overlooks that stile."

Paternal Relative turned purple, but kept his presence of mind, and showed it by jingling money in his pocket to attract girlie's attention to his next move; which was to take out a handful of coin, gold and silver mixed, and offer it to her surreptitiously. A gleam of comprehension came into her animated little face. She took his hand and secured the money.

"Oh," she answered casually, as she pocketed her booty, "he just said good day."

Paternal Relative's normal colour returned, witness to his relief.

The duke looked at Lena out of the corner of his eye. He was mentally surveying the distance between the stile by the brook and the windows of her room at the Castle. He looked at her and then at her father, and sudden gravity masked his countenance, the kind of gravity behind which laughter lurks.

"You must have singularly good hearing," he remarked confidentially.

"Yes," she answered, unabashed. "I am in full possession of all my faculties, am I not, dad?"

"You are," Paternal Relative replied, with something like a groan.

Lena rattled her ill-gotten gains in her pocket as an accompaniment to an interval of thought. Then she nestled up to the duke, slipped her hand through his arm, and raised her wicked dark eyes to his face sentimentally.

"How nice you are!" she sighed. "I should so like to have been your duchess."

"You monkey," said the duke with an amused smile, eyeing her askance. "What do you want?"

The hill was trying to the little duchess on her high heels, and she had dropped behind, but now she came hurrying up. The duke gently disengaged his arm and contemplated the far horizon abstractedly. They were rounding the Castle now, and the sea was in sight.

"Lena, dear, you forget yourself," the duchess remonstrated. "At your age, behaving like a forward child! You must not worry the duke."

"I was not worrying the duke, Gracious Lady," Lena rejoined with caressing respect. "The duke doesn't allow himself to be worried by little things like me."

"Well, at any rate, don't do it again," said the duchess, retreating.

They had come out on the broad terrace in front of the Castle. It was their custom to stroll here for awhile after church on fine Sundays to enjoy the view—one of the finest in all that lovely land. The bay, with its flat shores scooped out between the horns of two majestic headlands; dark woods and green fields down to the water's edge; and the water gleaming iridescent that day in the sunshine, under an azure sky flecked with white clouds.

The duke and Lena manœuvred together again: "What do you want, you monkey?" he asked.

She gave him a knowing wink, and turned to her father, who was standing near by.

"When is the election coming on?" she asked.

"In the autumn," her father answered.

"Are you a politician?" the duke asked her, with a twinkle.

"I am my father's daughter," she answered with an ambigu-

ous smile, and turned to him again; "I suppose, when the time comes, you will be cut and about all over the country, like other patriots, lying as usual for party purposes?" she said.

"Come, come, Lena," said Colonel Kedlock sternly, "is that the way to speak to your father?"

"Oh dear, *dear* duke!" she exclaimed, ignoring her father, and clasping her hands at the duke entreatingly. "Do let me stay here all the time. I love to be here."

Many people besides Mrs. Blatchford thought her beauty questionable, but nobody could have doubted it when she had that expression on her face and in her wicked dark eyes. The duke looked down into them, and smiled with the genuinely pleased if somewhat fatuous smile of an elderly man in whom youth of feeling has been flattered back for awhile by a winning young woman.

"Of course you shall stay here if you like," he said, "and for as long as you like. You pickle," he added, confidentially.

"You *are* a dear," she whispered, and slipped away. Having gained her point, she had done with the elderly men. Eustace and his sister were walking up and down together. She joined them.

"That's settled!" she exclaimed, getting between them and taking an arm of each.

"What is—er—settled?" Eustace asked.

"That I'm to stay here as long as I like."

"And—er—how long will that—er—be?" he asked.

*"Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment book unfold,"*

she chanted at the top of her voice.

"Oh, that child!" the duchess exclaimed. "Lena, *have* you forgotten? It is Sunday."

Ella Banks had been one of the first to slip out of church. There was a path through the park to the wood which skirted her father's farm, a long way round, but she went that way; and it seemed natural and wise that she should this lovely morning, shut up as she had been from daylight till dark every day of the week, working at her lace, she whose love of liberty

and air and exercise, and all things else that make for health and beauty, was a glowing enthusiasm. Quietly as she had slipped away her departure was not unobserved. Two at least of the congregation had watched her go, and taken the trouble to see which road she took—her half-brother Robert and Lord Melton.

On leaving the church, Melton hovered about for a little, speaking to one and another, but edging all the time towards the gate. On reaching it, he turned off sharp to the left and was hidden to view on the high road which was below the churchyard. He crossed the road, entered the park, and set off briskly, making a diagonal short cut across the grass to the wood at the further side, thereby shortening the distance by one-half.

Robert Banks, who was incapable of anything indirect, had gone straight to the churchyard wall to see which way his sister went. He waited there with his eye on Melton, and when that young man made a bee-line for the wood, Robert nodded, as if that were what he had expected; then he followed his family home by the high road, sorely perplexed.

Between the park and the wood there was a deep dell, down which a clear brown stream, direct from the moors, frothed and tumbled over a rocky bed in miniature cascades. The stream was crossed by a narrow rustic bridge, and here Melton stationed himself. Beech-trees covered the steep slopes on either side, their great grey boles crowned with their earliest tender green. Up the stream, through a frame of trees, the moors could be seen, rising purple in the distance. In the other direction a gleaming medallion of opaline sea and sky appeared through the gap down which the stream tumbled to the shore, and high above on the right were the rugged precipitous cliffs known as the Coastguard's Death. It was a spot to give pause, not to ponder but to feel; one of those spots where nature, making her full claim upon mankind, triumphs insidiously.

Melton, the colour deepened on his dark face by the rapid sprint he had made across the park, leant, with his hat in his hand, against the rail of the bridge, looking up the path by which she must come—if she had not turned back. The possibility clutched him and held him in suspense. But she

had not turned back. He heard the dry twigs crackling under her feet before he saw her, and his heart thumped heavily, his breath came short. Presently she was there on the winding path, her young figure informed with superabundant health and vitality; her walk, her whole mien and carriage, in their grace, stirring the senses to a sigh of satisfaction. Exercise had tinged the transparent whiteness of her cheeks with the delicate faint flush of the wild rose. Her eyes sparkled; there were red gleams in her black hair; she was intensely alive. And composed. That was what struck him, her singular composure; so in contrast to the agitation he could not conceal. He felt her composure a barrier between them, a suit of armour, a weapon at need. She showed no emotion on seeing him there, nothing but a pleased recognition. It was he who was perturbed. As she came down the path, she smiled, and it was she who spoke first.

"How good it is to be alive!" she said.

His answer was in his eyes as he gazed at her; there was no need of speech.

When she came up to him on the narrow bridge, she was obliged to stop, there being no room to pass; but she would have stopped in any case. They leant together against the rail and looked about them.

"How perfect!" she said.

"Yes—now," he answered. "There was something wanting before you came."

Ella's colour deepened. She felt that there would have been something wanting for her too had she been there alone. The influences of the hour would have been incomplete without the young man beside her. Without him, warmth and light and colour and sound would have failed of their effect. It was his nearness that made her one with nature.

"Oh, for the word!" she sighed. He looked at her inquiringly. "The word to express it," she exclaimed, looking all round her; "*le mot qui grise*."

His mind glanced away to account for the French which had slipped in so easily. Then he remembered how Adnam had taught her, and the day changed; the first fine feeling was subsiding; he began to find something to say.

"Do you take it at a single word?" he said.

"Oh, no," she answered. "I take it in the phrase. One word would hardly do it. Think of

"*... magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn—*"

which is the word in that? 'Perilous,' perhaps. But then there is 'magic' and 'forlorn.' No, it is the whole phrase."

The intoxication in it had flown to her face.

"*Mot* in the sense of *bon mot*," he said, and cooled her enthusiasm. "Do you have plenty of books—all that you want?"

"Yes, I think so, thank you," she answered, "as many, at least, as I have time for. Adnam lends me as many as I want."

Adnam, of course!

As they stood there together, her splendid physique contrasted with the attenuation of the racehorse type, the pity of it was the thing suggested, should she be for him. Yet he pleased her; that was evident. His well-kept hands, the spotless freshness of everything he wore, the refinement of every word and gesture, the charm of his cultivated voice, the courtly consideration of his manner; in all that was him or his, there was refreshment and relief for Ella, whose every sensitive nerve was rasped from morning till night by the sordid roughness of her life at home. Their thoughts were running on the same theme. The girl's refinement made its appeal to Melton as his to her. As she stood there, with one foot a little advanced from beneath her skirt, tapping the ground, suddenly, he saw again—or felt—the elusive likeness which had puzzled him once before. Of whom—or what—did she remind him? He looked down, trying to remember; but, in doing so, he noticed her slender, high arched foot, finely formed as his own, which was a foot with a pedigree, and forgot the question. He had thought her well-dressed, the whole effect satisfied him; but now his attention wandered to the details. There was nothing tawdry here, yet it did not strike him that she was dressed above her station, only that she was well-dressed. She would have looked so in almost anything. What she wore was the acme of simplicity, the simplicity of goodness, a costly kind

which does not advertise its price. The fine dark blue serge of her gown, the lace that edged her white fichu, the coarse black straw of the hat that framed her face and the ribbon of the black bows that trimmed it, all were the best of their kind. It was the fastidiously quiet dress of a lady, and she looked like a lady in it. This Melton saw, and there slipped from him unawares, to his own consternation when it was too late, the thought it suggested: "Where do you get your look of breeding from?"

She drew herself up and answered proudly: "I have seen gentlemen by birth compare ill with my brother Robert in his working dress."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," he blundered, in haste to cover the lapse. "Your brother Robert is as good a gentleman as any of us."

"I don't know about gentlemen," Ella said; "my brother Robert is my ideal of a man."

Melton felt that he fell short of her ideal. But she had made as if to go, and his one thought was how to detain her.

"I have offended you," he said. "Please forgive me. And, believe me, I meant nothing derogatory—no disparagement of your kindred. You look to me like a hothouse flower among the buttercups and daisies, and I wondered how you got there. I wasn't saying that buttercups and daisies are not fresh and sweet; have no beauty of their own; only that they are different."

Ella, turning, leant on the rail, and looked up at the Coast-guard's Death.

"Do you forgive me?" he said.

"What is there to forgive?" she answered.

He had come close to her; they looked into each other's faces for a moment, then she moved a little away.

A breeze swept by, rustling the leaves. The clear brown water below sang its own song as it dashed from stone to stone. A shaft of sunlight shot over the crags of the rugged cliff and rested there. The curious effect of stillness made up of many sounds wrought upon them, drawing them close together again in sympathy.

Melton looked up at the Coast-guard's Death. "My mother had a strange dream last night," he said. "She is very psychic.

She sees things and dreams dreams, and Mrs. Pratt interprets for her. It is all very uncanny and nice. Last night she dreamt she saw me on Platinum—at least, the horse looked like Platinum, but she thought it must be another horse that resembled him, a descendant probably, because I was much older than I am now. And my mother saw me riding this horse full tilt from the Castle to the Coastguard's Death, and when I came to the edge of the cliff, I took off my hat and waved it and cheered for Death, and went over cheering. And my mother said that she knew—she knew that it was the best thing I could do."

Ella shivered: "What a horrible dream," she said. "What circumstances could you possibly be placed in that could make it the best thing to do? Can you think of any? I cannot."

"I cannot either," Melton said. "It would have to be some terrible dishonour, something that would attach a stigma to my children's children."

"Cheating at cards," she suggested lightly.

They both laughed at the absurdity.

There was a little pause, then Ella returned to the subject indirectly: "You know that the Coastguard appears?" she said. "It is said that members of your family can see him."

"I should think my mother could then, if any one can," he observed.

"But she is not of your family."

"Not of my family!" he raised his eyebrows. "Oh, I see what you mean. Not a Brabant. Curious. I never thought of that before. Anyhow, if there are strange things to be seen, she would certainly see them."

Her delicate ungloved hand was resting on the rail beside him. He longed to take it in his, but he knew better. This girl was not one to make herself cheap.

"What size do you take in gloves?" he asked.

She glanced at her hand and laughed. "I don't know," she said. "I have never had any but leather gloves, and those I try on in the shop."

He longed to give her gloves, boxes full. He saw himself pouring jewels into her lap. What was there he would not have given her had he dared? But he did not dare. He knew better.

She was looking up at the Coastguard's Death again, and he was watching her face. Suddenly a horrid thrill crimped her skin. Clearly outlined against the sky, she saw a man, and recognised in him the man beside her. "Look!" she exclaimed.

His glance followed her eyes up to the figure on the cliff.

"What is it?" she whispered. "It looks like you."

"I see no one," he answered, peering. "But if it looks like me, then it is my brother Eustace. We are often mistaken for one another in the distance. Why did you start? What has frightened you?"

She passed her hand over her eyes: "The duchess's dream, I suppose," she answered, with an affectation of lightness, but she was still moved, and the colour was flickering on her face.

Melton saw her emotion with concern.

"You stay indoors too much," he said. "It is making you nervous. I often think of you, shut up at work on days like this."

"On days like this I work with the window open," she answered smiling.

"But the monotony," he said; "the long hours, the confinement. It is imprisonment with hard labour. You only come out in the dusk, and then as often as not you only wander about up and down the road near your home."

His intimate knowledge of her habits did not escape her, but she let it pass.

"It is not monotonous," she said, "my work, I mean. It is a joy to see the lovely designs appear in the delicate fabric. I hardly know sometimes how the day has gone. Lace seems to me the nearest thing to nature's loveliest fancies that human skill accomplishes. Look up through the leaves of the beeches! There is green lace for you, the patterns all woven of sunshine and shadow. Do you feel it? You don't! Oh, for the word—there should be a word to make you feel it, *le mot qui grise*."

He was looking at her as she spoke, and dangerously near to intoxication without the word. The atmosphere had become charged with emotion—more of it than she cared to countenance.

"I must go," she broke off hastily. "I shall be late. If you please. You are blocking the way."

He moved aside on the narrow bridge, apologising.

"Let me walk back with you," he pleaded. "I see you so seldom."

She smiled and he followed her.

"Why do I see you so seldom—Ella?" he ventured. "Won't you come sometimes—a little way further down the road, to the little gate—when it is too dark to work? It is too dark to work before it is too dark to walk, you know. Come, do—to-morrow. Promise me."

"To what end?" she asked. "I can see no good to come of it."

"But no harm can come of it," he answered, honestly believing what he said. He had no design except to see her, to speak to her. It was she who did all the looking ahead. She knew what she wanted exactly.

The little gate he spoke of was at the end of the path they were following. It was the step on to the high road from the wood, the high road which wound round by Red Rose Farm lower down. They had come to it, and she had not answered him.

"Promise," he repeated urgently.

"Good-bye!" she said, and wound through the little gate. "Good-bye!" she repeated from the other side, and nodded and smiled and hurried away.

At the first bend of the road she met her half-brother Robert face to face.

"You've been long on the way," he said nervously, not liking the task he had set himself.

"Yes," she answered, with her habitual composure, and the answer disconcerted him somehow, it was so perfectly unconcerned. "I met Lord Melton at the bridge, and we stood and talked, and then he came on with me as far as the gate." She looked up into his candid, serious face. "You are put out," she said.

"He followed you," Robert answered. "I saw him. Leastways he took the short cut, so's to meet you. No harm, of course. You're both young. But, if you'll take it kindly, Ella, I'd like to mention, bein' your brother, that it's not the thing

to do. It's natural, you may say, but there's many a thing comes natural as isn't the right thing to do. And he mustn't do it again. He's six-and-twenty, Ella, and at that age a girl like you can do what she likes with a man, so long's he's clean. And there's never a word ag'in Melton. I've seen him grow up from a lad, an' he's grown up straight. But—just now—I misdoubt if he's thinkin', an' it's you that must do the thinkin' for him. I don't blame 'im. It's natural. A man may speak to a girl an' no harm, but he mustn't do it many times if they're not to be married, or folks will talk, an' that's hard on the girl. He mustn't be seen hanging about her. I'm supposing," he added, by way of showing that the matter was not too serious for a jest, "I'm supposing, you see, that you're not for marrying Lord Melton."

"Not at present," she answered with a smile. He took that for a return of his pleasantry and was satisfied.

"Thank you, Bob," she continued. "I take your counsel kindly."

Simple and honest as he was, he stood in awe of his splendid sister, and had dreaded to do his duty in this matter, not knowing at all if she would stand any interference. One day, returning from his work, he had seen Lord Melton ride by, looking up to the window where she sat, and had thought nothing of it. But the same thing happened on so many subsequent occasions that Robert began to think. And after that he made a point of seeing, and drew his own conclusions.

"Thank *you* kindly, Ella," he said. "I didn't like to speak, but I thought I had oughter."

"You were right, Bob," she answered him earnestly. "You always are right. He shall not walk with me again."

They had reached the farm by this time and no more was said.

CHAPTER XVII

ONE morning, about ten days later, there was a variation in the tranquil regularity of the life at Pratt's Place. Breakfast was being brought in to the oak-panelled hall. Mrs. Pratt was looping back the heavy crimson curtains which prevented the

sun from streaming in. "Where the sun does not come the doctor does," she translated the Italian proverb. The three tall windows were open wide, and the low dark hall was sweet with fresh air. She remained a moment, with one hand still raised, holding on to the curtain, and looked out across her flower garden over the woods to the silver streak of sea. Standing so, in her long black dress, the slender elegance of her figure outlined against the rich colour of the curtain, her flaxen hair massed in shining coils round her head, she made a picture which old Emery, from the hearth at the other end of the hall, contemplated with pride and pleasure.

Seraph came in, tip-toeing, and hung about the table, stealing furtive glances, now at his parents to see if they were watching him, now at a pile of letters addressed to Adnam, who had not yet appeared. The movement caught his father's eye.

"Thy son has an ample correspondence," he said, addressing his wife across the hall. Adnam came in at that moment from the Orchard, taking off his gloves. He saluted his father, kissed his mother, went to his place at the table, and stood, waiting for his parents to take their seats.

"No time to waste, eh?" his father chuckled, coming forward himself as he spoke. Adnam's promptness was always a wonder to him.

"You've a heavy correspondence," Seraph said when they had seated themselves, his curiosity not to be contained.

"Answers to an advertisement," Adnam replied, pushing the pile of letters to one side. "I've been advertising for men," he explained to his father.

Old Emery nodded, but there was no knowing what he thought of this strange proceeding, because he did not know what to think of it himself.

As the breakfast proceeded, curious unwonted sounds floated in through the open windows. At first there was a distant heavy rumbling, accompanied, as the sound approached, by intermittent puffings and snortings and an occasional shout. Then voices could be heard, gradually swelling in volume to a loud clamour, as of many men talking at once.

"Hush, what's that?" old Emery asked sharply of a maid who came bustling into the hall from the back premises, bring-

ing a dish of grilled ham, hot from the fire, and letting in the noise more distinctly through the door, which she had left open behind her.

"Please, sir, it's a railway train on the road and a great van and a hundred men in the yard asking for Mr. Adnam," she babbled in high excitement.

Adnam became the centre of attention.

"They must wait," he said, unsurprised. "I'm at breakfast. Give me some ham."

"A hundred men?" his father ejaculated.

"Not fifty, I should think," said Adnam, reaching for the mustard. "The majority would be added to the tale just to complete the wonder. The advertisement must have brought them, though I didn't ask them to come so far merely on the chance of getting a job."

"Do they come like that at your call!" said old Emery, much impressed. "And I could hardly get half a dozen extra last harvest for love or money."

"Love and money are no use if the men don't hear that they are being offered. And how are they to hear it, if they are not on the spot? I'm told that there are thousands of starving men tramping about the country on the lookout for work. You can judge if they're eager—" He paused, and the clamour of men's voices in animated talk floated in through the open windows. "Those fellows must have tramped miles on the chance of getting a job."

"But what's this about a railway train?" said Emery.

"It's a traction-engine and some trucks of manure from Closeminster, I expect," said Adnam. "And the van must be a railway van with tents and bedding from London for the men."

Old Emery pushed his plate away and looked at his son. The unexampled independence of Adnam's proceedings found his slow-moving mind, set deep in a groove of habit, at a loss. Cautious consideration and much discussion had preceded every unusual move in his own life. But he neither approved nor disapproved, his judgment was held in suspense. He might have been reassured had he looked at his wife, whose delicate face was aglow with enthusiasm.

"It's a good deal to have to see to all at once," she said,

her tone expressive of confidence in Adnam's ability to see to it.

"It has just happened so," said Adnam, unperturbed. "I told them in Closeminster not to send till I let them know I was ready. They've made a mistake; but it's as well, since the men are here. I can turn them on to the work at once."

"How fine a thing it is to be a man of means!" Seraph sneered.

"Time is my capital just now," said Adnam.

His father was leaving the table and Adnam rose too.

"Will you come and have a look at the men, sir?" he asked.

Old Emery nodded, and they went out together by the side door into the garden and round to the yard. Here the hubbub of men's voices was deafening. The glint of a medal on a man's breast caught Adnam's eye and determined his proceedings.

"'Tention!" he roared.

Father and son had come upon most of them from behind, and this was the first intimation they had of their arrival. There was an instant hush, and the men swung round.

"'Shun!" Adnam once more roared.

Involuntarily several of the men stood to attention.

"Old soldiers to the front!" Adnam shouted.

There was a movement in the crowd, and about a dozen men came forward, making gaps where they passed through the ranks. Adnam's advertisement had been for men to do spade work, and, as he expected, a motley crew had applied. Any sort of workman, down on his luck, thinks himself equal to spade work, and Adnam had reckoned upon this to get together a staff with the various qualifications necessary for his purpose. One by one he questioned the men who had answered to the call for "old soldiers." Several were militiamen, the rest had been regulars, short-service men, time expired. With the glint of the medal in the sunshine, which had suggested soldiers present to his quick apprehension, there also flashed through Adnam's mind the necessity for strict discipline in a camp like this which he projected, and the value of the men who had done their drill as a help to maintain it. He examined their papers carefully and found them satisfactory. There were two gardeners amongst them, a carpenter, and a

hodman. The rest owned to no trade, but professed themselves ready to do anything. The hodman, who had been in a Guards Regiment, was a brawny giant, with bushy red whiskers, narrow green eyes, and a soft little lisping voice, startlingly small for his size. It was as if some gentle spirit, not half big enough and much too refined for his body, had taken possession of it. When he had done with these men, Adnam looked the others over and counted them. They dropped a word here and there to each other, but were silent for the most part, watching the proceedings anxiously. Many of them had travelled far, and all of them had walked out from Closterminster. Several showed signs of exhaustion which Adnam was quick to observe. Notebook and pencil in hand, after an impartial survey, he stood considering, his father looking on meanwhile as at some strange game in which he had no interest but that of a spectator. In the pause the men began to mutter among themselves. Adnam silenced them. One of them spoke up: "I've tramped fifty miles for this job, sir," he said.

"Form file," said Adnam, ignoring this appeal.

The men fell in one behind the other. "Now," said Adnam, "one at a time."

The first man happened to be the speaker.

"Name?" Adnam asked, with pencil ready.

"Markham Niel."

"What can you do?"

"I'm a gardener, sir. Anything in a garden."

"Married man?"

"No, sir." Adnam considered him. He was a slender, intelligent looking dark man about thirty. "Here's my certificates," he said, holding out a bundle of papers.

"How did you lose your last job?" Adnam asked, examining the papers as he spoke.

"My master died and the place was shut up, sir."

"Ever lived in a tent?"

"No, sir, but I've no objection. My wages is twenty shillings a week."

"I'll give you fifteen and tent room," Adnam said. "No rent to pay. And a rise if I find you worth it."

"I'll take it, master," the man said, resignedly.

"Pass on," said Adnam.

The man stepped aside briskly.

"No tents rent free for me," a slouching, discontented-looking fellow grumbled audibly.

"Hi, you tramp there, be off!" Adnam shouted at him.

The other men laughed uproariously. Public opinion was evidently against the tramp and he slunk away.

When Adnam had finished his inspection, thirty eligible men remained. He addressed them collectively: "I'm turning a twelve acre field over there into a market garden," he said; "not an ordinary market garden where you let things grow so as in due time you may enjoy them. Things in my garden have got to grow in double-quick time. Any of you heard of intensive culture?"

"The way they do in France?" It was Markham Niel who spoke up.

"Just so," said Adnam. "They make it do there to the tune of cent. per cent. And what a Frenchman can do an Englishman can do. Much better!" ("Hear, Hear," from all sides.) "There's work of all kinds to be done in my garden," Adnam continued; "rough work to begin with. Every inch of ground must be turned with the spade and every ounce of earth sifted. Then skilled labour to follow. Work for carpenter, glazier, bricklayer—and his little mate, the hodman." Another laugh. "And gardeners all the time. There is no house-room to be had for workmen hereabouts. Those who stop with me must go under canvas. They'll be welcome to tent room till I can build. And I'll give it them rent free. Now, I can give every man Jack of you a job if you'll take it. But I can't promise any one of you that the job will be permanent. It may last any time from six days to sixty years. Also you mayn't be my sort——"

"What about grub, master?" a melancholy, dyspeptic-looking man in the background interrupted. "What a workman wants is his vittells reg'lar."

"And plenty of 'em," a cheerful voice put in.

There were loud assents to this.

"I'm with you there, my men," said Adnam. "But your food is your own business. Do you understand me? All that I can offer you at present is a sporting chance. And you'll have to turn to at anything that's got to be done. To-day

there'll be those trucks of manure to unload, the tents to be pitched, and yourselves to settle in generally. To-morrow you'll have to turn to at whatever comes next. Those who are for the job, hold up their hands! Those who won't take it, clear out!"

Every hand went up.

Then Adnam changed his tone, which had been harsh and domineering. The men had seen him as master; they should see him now as friend. His father had stood silently by throughout the proceedings, watching him as a parent watches a precocious child, half-puzzled and wholly pleased. This Adnam of his was not to be realised! The men had been puzzled too. Adnam's methods were altogether out of the ordinary, but that told to his advantage by quickening the men's attention. Becoming interested in him, they forgot themselves in their desire to see what next. So far Adnam had considered them as material for his purpose, now he saw them as human beings. Not more than half the number that had set out for Pratt's Place had arrived. The distance had weeded out the weak-willed and the "slouchers." Those that remained were decent-looking men, poverty-stricken for the most part, but washed and shaved and generally self-respecting in appearance, their clothing brushed and mended, the clothing of workmen too, bearing reassuring witness in make and material to the wearer's social status as well above that of the tramp. One pathetic detail was observable in the greater number, a pinched and hungry look, the want of food. That was the item Adnam seized upon as requiring immediate attention.

"You're hungry, my men," he said. "I'll start you with a good breakfast."

The spontaneous cheer that went up at this announcement caused old Emery to smile.

"Well," he said, "you're right about the hunger, that's plain. But how about consistency? I thought the men were to feed themselves."

"See Emerson on a foolish consistency," Adnam answered with his infectious smile. "Besides, a man you ask to breakfast doesn't expect you to keep him for the rest of his life."

"True," said old Emery. "But where's the good breakfast to come from on this occasion?"

"If Pratt's Place can't give my men a breakfast on a pinch it's in a bad way," said Adnam; "and if Pratt's Place won't give my men a breakfast, it's time I turned my back on it." He became serious. "I don't want to sponge on you, father," he explained. "I only ask for the accommodation. It can go down to my account. Time is my capital, you know."

Old Emery could scarcely restrain his delight in this lad, who was at once so much of a man and so much of a boy. He kept his gravity by remaining silent; but Adnam, who could read him like a book, knew that the day was his.

"There are those things we have for the harvest supper," he suggested. "They would do."

"You can have all you want, my son, and welcome," old Emery answered.

He stood for a little, looking round, as if anxious to fix the scene in his mind; then walked away deliberately into the house. Mrs. Pratt was standing with her back to him when he entered the hall.

"'Tention!" he roared, then burst into one of his fits of gigantic laughter. If the earth could laugh aloud in its glee on a bright summer day, it would laugh like old Emery Pratt.

His lady had jumped, and turned round in affright when he roared.

"I've startled thee, dear," he said. "Forgive the old man! But, Lord, if you'd seen him and heard him!" He spluttered again. "'Tention!' he says to them, and had 'em as mild as milk in a minute."

After giving his wife a detailed account of Adnam's proceedings he concluded with "'Time's my money'!—no," he corrected himself; "'my capital' was what he said, and it's not the same thing." He took out a huge silk handkerchief. "Thy son, dear heart," he got out as he wiped his eyes; "thy son is brand new—brand new." He paused to enjoy this discovery, smiling to himself the while. He could not take Adnam seriously. All that the boy did, appeared to old Emery to be a sort of game which his mother encouraged him to play at so as to keep him out of mischief. Another point recurred to him. "And they're to have a breakfast," he told his wife.

"Pratt's Place is to give his men a breakfast, to start them, at his expense."

The housekeeper in Mrs. Pratt became alert: "I must see to that," she said. "The kitchen will not be able to cope with such a number without orders. Happily yesterday was our baking day."

She left the old man murmuring to himself: "Brand new, brand new."

The idea that had flashed into Adnam's fertile mind from the old war medal had in it the germ of his success as an employer of labour. The soldier has a contempt for the time-wasteful slackness of the civilian; he has been trained to go at things with a will and to do them smartly. Old service men, once they are clear of the service, swear by it; and everywhere the natural man likes to play at soldiering. The flavour of military discipline, which Adnam by accident had imparted to his first encounter with the men, expanded automatically into a sort of militarism in all his arrangements. As when a regiment is marching through a town, pedestrians, inspired by the movement and the music, fall into step and march along with the men, enjoying for the moment the sensation of soldiering, so the civilians in Adnam's little band, although largely in the majority, involuntarily fell under control of the military spirit, and kept up with the ex-service men, who, themselves elated at the chance of showing off to the tune of "The way we do in the Army," had the whole contingent resolved into a fatigue party, and set to work with precision at the word of command, in no time. There was no pause. Having spoken to his father, Adnam went straight on, giving directions with the fluency of one who has his orders by heart.

"Look here, men," he said, "with my father's permission, there is to be breakfast for you as soon as it can be got ready. A bell will be rung to call you in. In the meantime work must be organised." He glanced at the notebook in which he had jotted down the names of the men and their former occupations, but he had little need to consult it. His fresh young mind, keenly alert, took in without effort all that he required for his purpose, and stored it in a memory not yet crowded enough to be torpid. He called out Hoskins, who had been in the serjeant's mess, Peter Patterson, a hospital orderly,

Anthony Cumberbatch, a cockney waiter, and Peter Green, a soldier servant, and sent them off to the kitchen to help with the breakfast. The civilians he sent to unload the vans under the direction of Robert Banks. The service men, among whom was one who had given his name as Corporal George Locke, a man of good address, whose appearance inspired confidence, Adnam took himself.

"You come with me," he said.

He led the way through the orchard to the further end of the field. Here, close to the corner where the brook, sheltered by the giant beech, expanded into a shallow pool, as if for a rest to gather strength for its final dash to the sea, was a level grassy space already marked out for the camp. This space was backed by the bank and high hedge which separated Adnam's Orchard from the next field. Across it, from the bank above, two magnificent chestnut-trees, pyramids of flowers and foliage, stretched out their huge limbs protectingly.

"This is the place," said Adnam. It never occurred to him to ask the soldier's expert opinion, but, as it happened, the soldier approved, and signified his approval with a comprehensive nod. "I leave you to see to the tents," Adnam went on, putting Locke in command by addressing him exclusively. "There will be cubic space and to spare for the number of men, but not bedding enough. I didn't expect to get my full complement all at once. But I'll go down to the village myself, and make some arrangements for the present. You'll find the tents in the van there, on the road."

He swung off when he had spoken, leaving the men looking at one another.

"Seems up to snuff, that young shaver," one of them observed.

"Seems pretty much of a man," said Corporal George Locke. "Now for the tents."

The men fell in and followed him.

On his way to the village, Adnam, glancing back, saw the men clustering round the trucks and van—men at last, hard at work already! His spirits rose. There was exhilaration in the light bright air. His young blood throbbed in his arteries, coursed through his veins, merrily. He felt himself up and doing, intensely alive. A thing that would have annoyed him

yesterday amused him to-day. The thing was Luke Banks, whom he met near the village, with his everlasting pipe in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, boots dirty, face unshaved, and his usual nondescript clothing, adding a broken-down look generally to unmistakable signs of recent dissipation. He changed countenance when he saw his employer. "I'm late, but I've a good reason," he was beginning. "I——"

"Never mind the lie this morning, Luke. I excuse you it," Adnam interrupted him in a hearty tone. "You haven't time both for my work and your own good pleasure, I know. I've seen that all along. No need to apologise. A man can't do everything. I knew, when I saw that you hadn't come again with Robert, that I should have to set you free, so I've filled up your place. Don't give yourself any more trouble on my account."

Luke's jaw dropped. He had appraised his services at an extravagant value, as indispensable in fact, in view of the scarcity of men, and had presumed on this to make holiday when it suited himself. His wrath rose. "Do I understand you to be telling me that you've chucked me, Mr. Adnam Pratt? That you've been and gone and put another man in my place without fair warning given?"

"I've put about thirty men in your place, Mr. Luke Banks," said Adnam. "Poor, miserable, down-trodden slaves, who are willing to work as well as to take their pay."

Irony is a cruel goad when there is a shameful truth in the point of it. Luke squared up to Adnam, doubling his fists. He probably would not have struck, but Adnam dealt less in probabilities than in possibilities and had bowled Luke over in the dust with a well-directed blow straight from the shoulder before that gentleman knew himself what he meant by the threat of his attitude.

"I'll have the law of you," he shouted at Adnam, sitting up, but not rising.

"Go home and get washed," said Adnam, walking off.

"You think a lot of yerself, Adnam Pratt," Luke hurled after him from his seat in the dust, "you son of an old huckster and a foreign hussy——"

Adnam was back on him and had him by the collar, hauling him on to his feet, at one bound.

"Get up, you cur," he said, speaking low through his teeth in concentrated fury. "The one thing you've earned since you came to me is a licking, and you're jolly well going to get it."

And Luke did get it. He showed what fight he could, but he never got a bit in, nor could he save himself from the blows showering on him from every side as Adnam danced round him, a whirlwind of fists and feet. The devil that slumbers in silent people, once roused, does devil's work, and Luke shouted "Murder!" with good reason. What was left of him lying on the road was only just alive, and would not have been that if he had not collapsed beyond the possibility of setting him up on his feet again. Training had made it second nature in Adnam to play fair, and, although drunk with rage, he could not strike the beast when he was down. He stood over him panting and with fists still clenched, but he did not touch him. He watched him, sick himself with eagerness to have him up and be at him again; but, as he waited, the enforced quiescence put his hot blood off the boil, the storm subsided, and his sanity returned as suddenly as the madness had seized him. He picked up his cap and dusted it, set right the disorder of his dress, and walked off, with very little more sign of disturbance upon him than before the encounter. Luke he left lying in the dirt. He made no pretence of helping him. He had done with him, as with vermin of any other kind, from the moment that he could beat him no more. It was Pettiblock who found him eventually and played the good Samaritan. And when Pettiblock asked Luke who or what had mauled him, Luke said he had been knocked down and rolled over by a runaway horse with a lady on it, which he had (galantly, understood) made an effort to stop by springing in front of it. With Lena Kedlock, notoriously the wildest rider known to those parts, staying at the Castle, the story of the runaway horse with a lady on it was not improbable. What Pettiblock did question was the kind of injuries inflicted by that horse. Never before had he seen or heard of such a thorough drubbing as the result of a casual kick.

Adnam went about his business with the stimulating feeling that he was having a finely varied good time all round. In the village he contracted to have bags made of stout material, seven feet long by four feet wide, open at one end, to be

delivered that evening; his intention being to have them filled with sweet hay, purchased from his father. He also ordered up a load of planks and such covering of rough rugs and blankets as he could get.

When he returned, he found his men seated round a long table on trestles in the servants' hall at an ample meal washed down with light beer. Their jolly talk and laughter could be heard down the road. When Adnam appeared, one of them rose with a mug in his hand: "Here's your health, squire, and good luck," he said.

The other men scrambled to their feet, and drank the toast with all honours.

The cockney waiter, equal to the occasion, handed Adnam a glass in time. He raised it. "Your health, men all," he responded. "Put your hearts into whatever you are at, whether it be work or whether it be play—I trust you'll have your share of both—and the luck will come to us all."

Moral sentiments come congenially after good cheer. Adnam left the servants' hall to the tune of "For he's a jolly good fellow."

He found his mother in a deprecating mood.

"So many men, Adnam!" she protested.

"Cheapest in the end, mother dear," he said. "They'll do the work in no time, which will be a great saving of wages. And I shall get my seeds in and up, expenses lowered and profits begun, before another man has done calculating the chances."

Adnam found the men accommodating. There was ample room in the two great tents. The sacks filled with sweet hay were restful enough. Covering was short, but the weather was warm and dry, and they made shift with their clothes. The novelty of the arrangements pleased them. The cockney waiter, whom they had promptly nicknamed Fusty Ginger on account of his colouring and the want of fresh air suggested by his whole appearance, expressed the general opinion when he said: "This bally picnic's rare sport. I'm agreeable for a good spell of it."

Bally picnic caught the men's fancy as a good comprehensive designation for the whole undertaking. Old Emery's feeling, that it was a sort of a game at which this bright boy with

plenty of money was playing, was latent amongst them, but they were prepared to respect the rules of the game and play fair, and they had taken to Adnam, whom they adopted from the first as "Our Young Shaver." There were difficulties about feeding, but here old Emery's generous hospitality again came to the rescue with a whole sheep, just to start them. The commissariat arrangements were put into the hands of Hoskins, who had been in the sergeant's mess, a capable fellow. He had to be seconded from Adnam's service for the purpose, but the men contributed to his support, and also to that of Fusty Ginger, whose ridiculous pretences with a spade were redeemed by high competency in the kitchen. Digging was beyond his strength, but he could cook. Adnam would have no beer in camp, but the men took kindly to tea and coffee. The fine weather and the healthy life in the open air told happily upon their spirits. Their appetites were too importunate for economy in food. Great cauldrons of savoury stew, rich with good meat and vegetables, were kept going, and there was bread and cheese and bacon in plenty. They were eagerly ready to pay up for food. Women in their place would have saved their pennies and suffered in health. Men are wiser. They feed themselves well when they can, and reap the benefit in strength and efficiency. Most of these men had never been full-fed in their lives, never tasted the wholesome exhilaration of an outdoor life in such surroundings, and it was as if they had never lived before. There was no harbour, not even a jetty on the shore, but some few fishermen and their families lived in cottages built in a sheltered cove on the further side of the Coast-guard's Death, and brought their fish for sale to the village. Fresh fish was a joy to the labouring men, but the climax came when they discovered for themselves that the sea was full of fresh fish to be had for the catching. From that time bathing and fishing from an old boat that belonged to Pratt's Place and was kept on the beach, became the staple relaxations of the camp, and the healthy sport told on the men, mentally and physically, with the best results. It gave them something to look forward to with pleasure, something to discuss with interest, something to eat with relish; the three principal ingredients that go to make up the good of life.

Adnam gave his men two days to settle; then, on the even-

ing of the second day, he went down to the camp, accompanied by Robert Banks. The night was starlit, bright, and fresh. The men had collected sticks and made a bonfire, round which most of them sat, some smoking, some mending their clothes, some drowsing. The flickering firelight, playing intermittently on the grey tents in the background, and on the green canopy of sheltering chestnut-trees, just then crowded with flowers, all upstanding like white wax candles, wrought the scene into strong relief for moments at a time; then, as the flames rose and fell, dropped it back again among the shadows. When Adnam appeared, the men suspended their various occupations. The old service men, mannerly always, stood up; most of the others followed their example; but some few did not move.

"Roll call, Robert," Adnam ordered. "Every man present answer 'Here' to his name."

He had given Robert orders to forewarn the men of this visit, and all were present.

When the roll call was complete Adnam said, "Silence now," and paused. And in the pause a hundred little sounds, far and near, a dog barking, a sheep coughing, the crackling of the fire, the babbling of the brook, the rustle of leaves, and that indeterminate noise made by the involuntary movements of people waiting in silence, became obtrusive. The effect of the pause, though not calculated by Adnam, who had merely hesitated to choose his words, was good. Workmen delight in a meeting, in oratory, in the sound of a speaker's voice and of their own. The prospect of a speech kindles their interest and sharpens their wits. When Adnam began, he was already in touch with his audience.

"You've had two days of this camp, men," he said at last. "You've had time to see what the work will be, and what the life will be when all's in order. The job may be a long one and it may not. I can't promise any one of you anything at present but the day's pay for the day's work, and no more than a day's notice to those I may have to discharge. There'll be permanent billets for some of you, but for how many I don't myself yet know. It will depend upon what you're good for, not only as workmen, but as decent members of society. There must be discipline in this camp. It is said that manners make a man. But you must dig deeper than that to find what makes

a man. What makes manners? Discipline! A man without discipline is no better than an untrained horse. You'll never be able to trust him. He'll be nasty at every turn. And so will the undisciplined man. By discipline I don't mean the goose step"—laughter—"I mean principle. Good principles are at the bottom of good discipline, therefore I say discipline makes the man." ("It does" from a voice in the background.) "I'll have no rowdy manners here. This camp must be a camp of gentlemen." ("Hear! hear!" unanimously.) Adnam paused to let the announcement sink in. One immediate effect of it became evident. The men who had hitherto kept their seats stood up. "I would deny no man his right to a glass of beer," Adnam proceeded. He was interrupted by a unanimous cheer. "But I deny to any man in my employ the right to make a beast of himself. The man who gets drunk, the man who gets into a row, the man who frequents low haunts and chums with bad characters, the man who brings a bad name on this camp by misconducting himself in any way—that man must go. He must be kicked out on the spot for the good of the camp." The men did not cheer this announcement. They took it seriously with a few "hear-hears." Adnam's oratory had gripped them. Moral rectitude was beginning to glow in their breasts. The capacity to adopt strong measures is a proof of power which inspires respect. In the resonant tones of Adnam's fine voice, in the clear cool unhurried enunciation of each word, in the simple directness, the absence of pose of any kind, he impressed them, in spite of his youth, as one who could command, a man who knew what he wanted and went for it straight. There was finality in his every utterance. From the law, as he laid it down, there would be no appeal. It is your shilly-shally that men cannot abide. Adnam's decision, acting like a bracing tonic, pulled his men together.

"This is a free country," he went on. "A man may live as he likes so long as he lives decently. Some of you men have had a respectable upbringing. You belong to various religious bodies, no doubt. Each worships in his own way, as each has a right to do. So long as he looks up to something better than himself, he'll keep straight. There is nothing that keeps a man up to the mark like the observance of Sunday.

The man who puts away on Saturday night everything that he has been using during the week, and puts away with his tools the thoughts of the week, and gives himself up on Sunday to different—to higher—thoughts; who stretches himself and disposes himself to rest his body and refresh his mind; that man will renew himself, and on Monday morning he will wake much more of a man. The cattle, nay, the very machines are the better for a day of rest. I don't say be dull on Sunday. On the contrary, I say enjoy the day, every hour of it; but make it Sunday. There is no variety of places of worship here. But those who would worship God will find Him the same God, their own God, in our little parish church, as they have found Him in their own communion. The man who has a God is a lucky man. On Sunday mornings I hope to see a strong contingent from this camp march into church—I hope to see them there for their own good, and for the good of those to whom, being men, they set a good example."

The acknowledgments that followed this effort were somewhat vague, but there was nothing hostile in them.

"For Sunday evenings I propose to find recreation," Adnam continued—then checked himself. He had been about to say that there would be recreation for the men who went to church, but perceived in time that it would be a mean bribe to offer it as a reward. "Recreation," he repeated—"or so I hope it will prove. With my father's approval, I invite you all to the house at eight o'clock—to be entertained to the best of our ability." The acknowledgments here were hearty. "For the discipline of the camp," Adnam concluded, "you must yourselves be responsible. Choose your own captain and officers, make your own rules, and stick to them. You know now what my rules are. Those who are willing to abide by them hold up their hands. Those who object to any one of them get out to-morrow morning. In favour!" Every hand went up. "Against!" Not a man moved. "Carried unanimously," Adnam announced. "Good. I have told you what you have to expect. I have had my say. If any man here would speak, now's his time." Adnam waited. In the pause there was some shuffling and whispering. Then the melancholy looking man, who had said at the hiring that what a man wanted was "his grub reg'lar," was pushed forward. This man never owned to

any trade. He described his former occupation as "odd jobs," but the men discovered in him something superior to odd jobs, and promptly dubbed him Shoemaker because of his lugubrious aspect, shoemakers being notoriously of a suicidal disposition. He took off his hat. "Which I don't want it to be thought I'm pushing," he began. "I speaks fur myself." ("Speak up!" a voice shouted from behind.) He cleared his throat and tried again. "Which I'm speaking fur myself," he repeated. "Odd jobs is my occipation. This 'ere's a odd job. Ef you'd tole me las' week I'd 'a' bin 'ere to-night a listenin' to a young Boss wot speaks like a bureau-crazy (bureaucracy) all by 'is lone, I'd not 'a' believed you. I'd 'a' laid it was an inwention, like them writin' chaps puts in the noosepapers." He stopped dead. ("Get on, old chap," came from the background, encouragingly.) "It's a rum start," he resumed, as if the words had been jerked out of him. "I don't say it's a bad start." ("Say it's a good 'un, then.") "Well," he conceded, deliberately, "I'll say it's a good 'un." The men laughed and cheered. The orator brisked up. "'Ere's a young Boss," he said, "as knows what 'e wants, an' tells us straight, tak' it or leave it. I fur one ses 'Thankee, sir, I tak's it.'" He made Adnam an awkward bow and backed to his place. Again the men cheered. Then they set up "For he's a jolly good fellow."

"It's a bargain, then," Adnam said when the chorus stopped. "In England we shake hands on a bargain."

The suggestion appealed to the men. They were in the mood to be pleased.

"We do!" they shouted.

Adnam held out his hand to the nearest. The rest fell into line and filed by, each, as he came up to Adnam, stopping to shake hands, and at the same time each said, "It's a bargain," solemnly, and somehow felt that he had taken an oath of allegiance.

The ceremony ended with three cheers for Adnam, and three for Queen and country, three more for Foreman Robert Banks, and an extra three for the Shoemaker—the cumulative effect being a species of intoxication, under cover of which Adnam, followed by his aide-de-camp, withdrew.

"I'm much obliged to you for stopping to-night, Robert," Adnam said. "What do you think of this day's doings?"

"Well," said Robert in his slow way, "I agree with that melancholy chap, 'it's a rum start.'"

"Say 'It's a good 'un,'" Adnam followed on.

"I'll say it looks like a good 'un," Robert cautiously allowed.

CHAPTER XVIII

OLD EMERY'S interest in Adnam's Orchard increased. It was the new toy of his old age, a sort of mechanical contrivance kept going for him by Adnam whenever he chose to play with it. Always when he appeared, Adnam received him ceremoniously, and insisted on showing him round. At first he saw nothing but chaos, with men swarming about for the sole purpose, as it seemed to him, of getting in each other's way. Then order began to grow out of chaos. Neat paths cut the oblong field into exact divisions, and at regular intervals, where the paths intersected each other, were circular spaces, in the centre of each of which came first a round of brickwork, then neat mouldings of stucco, and behold deep basins with water laid on from the brook.

"Humph," said old Emery, contemplating the moulding round the basins; "cupids in the middle next, I suppose, blowing the water up into the air from conch shells."

"In time," said Adnam. "I'll beautify as I go along. It heartens one to have things look nice. I see no antagonism between use and beauty; they should be friends. In the old days, when men put heart into their work, they were friends."

Old Emery met this assertion with a grunt. He remembered having said something of the same kind himself to Adnam in his childhood when pointing out to him the beautiful workmanship on some old locks. "And when do you reckon to begin with your beautifications?" he asked.

"When I've got close planting in full swing," Adnam answered, taking him seriously, "and I'm getting my six and eight crops from a bed."

"What percentage of profit do you reckon to have then on your outlay per acre?"

"About six hundred."

"Six hundred per cent. an acre on twelve acres!" old Emery exclaimed, incredulously. "That comes to a tidy sum—more than I get off fourteen hundred, and I'm reckoned to do well."

"There won't be profit on twelve acres," said Adnam. "The paths take space, and the men, and the sheds."

Old Emery glanced to the north corner of the field, whence came a sound of incessant hammering. Men were clustering there thick just then, and there were great slabs of corrugated iron clanging as it was moved about. He went in without another word, and found his wife. "Thy son," he said, "is brand new, brand new."

Adnam found his old army men reliable and handy in many ways, but less expert than other workmen by reason of the time they had rusted in the service. Accustomed to discipline themselves, they influenced the public opinion of the camp in favour of discipline.

"When things go reg'lar they go easy," was one of Corporal George Locke's favourite maxims. "Do a thing yourself and you'll get it done," was another.

Adnam looked within for his knowledge of men, judging of their requirements by his own. The hot-bed of altruism laid in his character by his mother's teaching was bound to be productive. At present, in certain things, he was little more than an echo of her ideas, and a bit of a prig, no doubt, but what clever mother's son is not a bit of a prig at that age if he is going to succeed? The question of recreation was one of the first that he faced. He started a discussion on the subject at dinner the day after the men got into camp, and without waiting to see what they could do for themselves. Seraph gave him an opening by prognosticating drunkenness and rows. Adnam disconcerted him by agreeing to the possibility. "If they're to be kept straight, they must have wholesome amusement," he said. "People quote 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' and yet go on allowing it to be all work and no play for the villagers. What will these men of mine have for relaxation when their work is done? The village pub! There's not another place they can go to; not a thing to take them out of themselves but drink."

"They'll be glad enough to rest, I should think," his father said.

"I don't mean them to be glad enough to rest," said Adnam. "'Dumb cattle driven' won't do for my job. I must have intelligent work. That means shorter hours and good food. The labourer on the land is only too often good for nothing by the end of his day but to throw himself down like an animal and sleep. You see them everywhere, besotted with fatigue. A man should have a chance of living a man's life."

"What do you call a man's life?" old Emery asked, amused as always with the boy's precocity.

"A life in which his time can be so divided that everything he does is a pleasure to him," Adnam answered, after careful consideration. "Too much of anything upsets the balance. He must have work, and hard work too, but work that he likes. And he must have leisure in proper proportion for recreation, the recreation of his choice. An outdoor worker would turn to books probably, a mill hand would be all for a garden. There are hobbies enough for men to choose from if they have the time, and one wholesome hobby with leave to pursue it will keep a man out of the public-house."

"Who's your authority?" Seraph sniggered.

"Any man you like who's added a line to the 'Book of the Wisdom of Ages,'" Adnam answered unprovoked. "'To labour that we love we rise betimes,' 'The labour we delight in physics pain,' 'Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.'"

Old Emery looked at his wife and chuckled. New knowledge, like new clothes, is prone to be aired by the young. Adnam had his lesson off pat, and his father knew who had taught him it. He would not be so confidently didactic when he was a little older.

A sullen jealousy of his half-brother had seized upon Seraph lately; he had an absorbing desire to see Adnam's daring enterprise a failure. He had none of his father's large tolerance for the boyishness of a boy. The denial of ability in others gives the measure of a small mind; power of appreciation being lacking to it in every sense. Seraph saw nothing but bumptiousness in Adnam. What the ungenerous set down to bumptiousness is often a symptom of diffidence acting as a goad and driving us to untimely efforts to prove our case to ourselves more than to others. Self-assertiveness is a screen

behind which ignorance and doubt seek to conceal themselves, and ignorance and doubt there must be even in the most promising youth. Adnam was no exception, but he had the merit in which lies the one great hope of success in life. He was not above being taught, and, in spite of being opinionated, he did honestly desire to arrive at the truth rather than to prove himself right. Unfortunately Seraph's covert sneers had often the effect of provoking him to dogmatise, when, with a little sympathetic encouragement, it would have been more natural to him to defer.

"You have some plan of recreation in your head for your men, I suppose," his father said.

"Why not import an opera company for their amusement?" Seraph suggested.

But old Emery had been struck by Adnam's remarks. He looked across to his lady and nodded a request for her help.

"Would it be any use," she ventured upon reflection, "to have some music for them? On Sunday evening, for instance—a little entertainment in the hall, and a little supper afterwards. We could play and sing to them. And doubtless they can play and sing themselves, some of them. What do you say?"

Old Emery could say nothing at first; such a revolutionary suggestion struck him dumb.

"We need only ask the well-conducted ones," Mrs. Pratt added, to give him time.

"If any are asked, all must be asked. I can make no distinction in such a matter," Adnam declared.

"You're right there, my boy," his father agreed, avoiding the main issue by picking up this point. "Never make favourites. What's the matter with *you*, Seraph?" he broke off sharply.

Seraph had hunched his shoulders and sniggered significantly when his father spoke of favourites. His father understood him and was irritated into giving his consent to the scheme.

This was how it came about that Adnam had been able to invite the men when he addressed them on that first occasion.

The following Sunday morning being fine and bright, found all the people of the neighbourhood in their usual places in

church. Church being the one place of re-union, the only opportunity people had of seeing their fellow creatures gathered together, it was the custom to get there in good time for the purpose of observation. To watch others come in was the diversion aimed at, there was so much more to be seen of them as they walked up the aisle to their places. Mrs. Pratt always spent the interval in prayer, and nobody minded that now; but when she was first seen to do so, the practice caused a good deal of comment. Nobody else indulged in more than momentary private devotions, and, from the remarks people made on the subject at first, it might have been supposed that Mrs. Pratt was taking an unfair advantage of other members of the congregation when she approached the throne of grace with such unwonted assiduity. But people were pretty careful about how they interfered with Mrs. Pratt because of the duchess's devotion. This had brought upon Mrs. Pratt the notice of the whole neighbourhood. The affluent Pratts, although only yeoman, had always been countenanced in a kind of way, but for this Mrs. Pratt it was agreed that something more must be done. Mrs. Blatchford said it would be quite easy if only Mr. Emery Pratt were addressed as Esquire, and surely he might be now, so well off as he was. Mrs. Pointz agreed to that, and made the suggestion to the duchess, upon whom she fawned. Unfortunately it made the little lady sick to be fawned upon, and not being able at any time to discriminate clearly between cause and effect, she set her sickness down on this occasion to the suggestion, and rejected it abruptly. The experiment of addressing Yeoman Pratt as Emery Pratt, Esquire, was tried, but it roused him to such wrath that nobody dared to repeat it. "That fool nonsense of esquire may be for the man that follows me," he said; "but for me, none of your mock titles." And he had added to himself sorrowfully: "I'm like to be the last of the Pratts." For Seraph certainly was no Pratt, and Adnam had not then declared himself.

All the same, everybody called upon Mrs. Pratt, and Mrs. Pratt civilly acknowledged the civility, but she allowed it to go no further. And she was wise. For the neighbourhood would have been obliged to change its whole outlook upon life in order to associate comfortably with Ursula Pratt.

Once having become accustomed to Mrs. Pratt's private devotions, the congregation had allowed them with the sanction of indifference; and every one else acted in church after his or her own kind with a regularity that could be calculated upon. The duchess that morning beamed round brightly on everybody without seeing anyone in particular; her vivacious little mind being busy as usual, hopping about from one thing to another as a bird hops about, in search of food. Seraph Pratt cast sentimental glances furtively at Godiva Pointz, who pretended to be unaware of the attention, but could not command the expression of satisfaction which changed her habitually discontented face and made it pleasant for the moment. Lena Kedlock, as she seated herself between her father and Eustace Brabant, shot a glance at Adnam, an unholy glance as it seemed to him. He had an uneasy suspicion that she meant some impertinence, and braced himself to resent it. "I'll neither be made a fool of nor make a fool of myself," was his thought, and a masked battery would have had more expression in its face than there was in his as he met her unsettling dark eyes. It was a masked battery with nothing to shoot at, however, for, as always in church, though she apparently looked, she did not see him. Her whole soul was wrapped in adoration.

The sun was decking Beryl Blatchford's fair hair with ripples of gold. Sitting all in white among the Sunday school children her fresh young face soft and sweet in its repose, she looked more than ever "The Girl with the Nimbus," a young Madonna engaged in the contemplation of holy things. But she was not so engaged, nor was she feeling at all reposeful. She was cross and dissatisfied. The incessant fidgeting of the Sunday school children irritated her. She did not like children of any kind; she had too much of them at home; and Sunday school children she particularly detested. At that moment she was envying Lady Ann, and thinking of all the good things in this world which were hers now and would be hers in the future—position, dresses, jewels, and the inevitable lover of a young girl's dreams. It was on such things that Beryl Blatchford's ambition centred; but, seeing her as she looked sitting there, no one would have accused her of anything but spiritual aspirations. Hard natures have a singular

command of countenance; observation stimulates them to look as they would have it believed that they are. She knew that she was attracting the eyes of every man in the church. Lord Melton did not notice her specially as a rule, but she encountered his glance more than once, and Algernon Pointz inspected her as if she were up for sale. Melton's glances were but momentary, a passing tribute to her beauty, then his eyes travelled on beyond her to the noble figure of Ella Banks, where they rested. Ella neither sought nor avoided his eyes. He had come in late and was sitting in the Rectory pew, to which Mrs. Blatchford had beckoned him, the Castle pew being full of friends of the duchess, down for the week-end. Eustace, sitting opposite, had become aware of the intentness of his brother's gaze in that one direction. The light behind Ella touched with red gleams the lustrous coils of her black hair. There was a curious stillness in her attitude, like the stillness of a statue, informed with beauty and displaying it, but without intention. Eustace appreciated the distinction of her whole personality and became grave. She touched him not at all as a woman. He felt about her somewhat as his mother did, uneasy; a feeling not to be defined, but recognisable as a danger signal nevertheless.

The moment before the voluntary should begin had arrived, a moment of lively expectation. It was as if the first part of the proceedings had ended, and the second part was to begin with the entrance of the rector. The congregation held itself ready; even the Sunday school children suspended operations; the sacred silence became intense. It was at this moment, when the organ should have struck up, that an unwonted sound became audible, a regular tramping. Every head was jerked round in time to see the sunshine, which was streaming in at the open door, blocked out by what looked like a moving mass of men. Following one of their number, two and two they marched up the side aisle, and took their seats in some pews which, it was afterwards found, had been reserved for them. Adnam flushed crimson. He had not expected the men to come in full force. He had thrown out what he intended for a recommendation, and they had acted upon it as an order. Only those engaged in cooking the dinner had remained in camp. There had been no difficulty about it. Fusty Ginger

supposed that church-going was part of "Our young Shaver's bally gime." This seemed likely to the other men, who accordingly took to the "gime" in the sporting spirit which makes hard work easy so long as it is done in the name of play. When Corporal George Locke formed them up and marched them off, the old service men felt important, as knowing all about it. It was like old times, old times much improved in the recollection by leaving out all that was unpleasant. For the civilians there was the delight of the amateur, besides the dignity of being a procession. Fusty Ginger played them off on a phantom fife to the tune of "The girl I left behind me," and, as they marched between the hedgerows, they took up the tune and whistled it in unison to keep themselves in step.

Their arrival in church caused a visible commotion. Even Mrs. Pratt looked up; Seraph straightened himself and scowled; and old Emery, recognising Adnam's men, threw back his head, and only remembered where he was just in time to save himself from giving expression to his pleasurable emotion in the way that was natural to him.

It was not generally known until afterwards to whom the men belonged, and the puzzled congregation speculated to the neglect of their prayers during the whole service.

This was the first intimation that the neighbourhood had received of the extent of Adnam's operations. Hitherto no one had believed that he really meant business. From this time on, however, they were obliged to take him seriously. But there was no applause. Instead, people pursed up their mouths. It could not be said that there was anything actually reprehensible in the appearance in church of these workmen—respectable enough in appearance, it was allowed on the one hand, but strangers from nobody knew where, it was objected on the other—yet it was felt that there was something wrong. It was an innovation, and there is nothing more suspicious to the English provincial mind than an innovation. Had the men gone to the public-house they would have been answering to expectation, and people would have known what to say and dismissed the matter from their minds when they had said it; but as they had no old-established formula to draw upon for the expression of the sensations to which this unexampled at-

tendance at church had given rise, the defect in their mental machinery translated itself into distrust of the proceeding; and when it was known that the men were all in Adnam Pratt's employ, that they lived in tents, and had nothing but a miserable scrap of a twelve acre field to labour, distrust deepened into fear. Squire Pointz gave expression to the feeling one evening during the following week at a little dinner-party in his own house.

"It's a dangerous precedent," he said, "a dangerous precedent. It will have a bad effect on all the labourers hereabouts. Give them ideas, you know, ideas, and then there'll be no dealing with them."

The day after the dinner-party, the duchess burst in upon her dear Ursula with her usual incoherent vivacity. She had walked through the wood to Pratt's Place, and on the way had stopped at Adnam's Orchard, and stood on the tips of her little pointed toes looking over the hedge to see what was going on there.

"Oh, my dear Ursula!" she exclaimed—kiss on one cheek—"what an ant-hill!"—kiss on the other cheek. "How are you going to pay for it all? And such a smell of cooking—really rather nice—savoury, you know. I do hope Adnam is not over-feeding them. It is so bad for them, you know, and so dangerous. We had a great discussion about it at Pointz last night, very interesting—so depressing. They become Radicals, you see, when they have too much to eat. Oh, Ursula, dearest, I do hope you are not going to become a Radical."

"Do you think I eat too much, then?" Mrs. Pratt ventured with half a smile.

"My dear!" the little lady exclaimed, fluttering her hands as if to hurl the bare idea into space. "If only you would eat a little more! You're so fragile, dear. Not that it makes much difference, eating. Look at Mrs. Pointz. She eats—oh!"—the hands went up—"and never grows stout. Not fragile, either. I should say gaunt. Wouldn't you?"

Mrs. Pratt didn't say anything. The little lady was tearing off her gloves in order to have her fingers free to help her speech.

"Brutal and licentious soldiery!" she ejaculated suddenly.

"Where?" Mrs. Pratt asked, looking out of the window, somewhat startled.

"Lena, you know," said the duchess. "Isn't it just like Lena? She was *so* disagreeable last night. But the poor child was not altogether to blame. It may be unkind, but really I don't like Mrs. Pointz. Still, I can't believe that seventy-five per cent. of them never know what it is to have enough to eat, can you? and waste everywhere, which accounts for the Radicals."

Mrs. Pratt waited for this tangle to unravel itself. She rang and ordered tea to fill up the interval.

"But, dear Ursula, do tell me," the duchess rambled on. "They say Adnam's a Radical."

"What do 'they' mean by that?" Mrs. Pratt asked tranquilly.

"Socialist, you know, Liberal—that kind of thing," the duchess replied.

"But Liberalism is opposed to Socialism," Mrs. Pratt gently informed her. "Liberalism is not a menace to wealth. Some of the wealthiest men in the country are Liberals. Active and beneficent wealth is a blessing to society—that is the working principle of Liberalism. The man who sets up a great industry, and gives worthy employment to his countrymen, uses his just profits to the advantage of the community. But there are several kinds of wealth. There is the wealth of the vile sweater, the vampire who grows fat on the life-blood of the people he oppresses, who tortures his profits out of helpless women and children as often as not. There is the wealth of the landlord who develops his land to the utmost, who regards his estate as a manufacturer regards his business, who recognises that a tilled England is safer than a preserved England, that peasants on his property are worth more than pheasants. You must see the difference between profitable and unprofitable wealth, between the idle rich, the parasites living on the labour of others and at the same time injuring them all they can, and those in whose hands wealth becomes industrial capital put out to profit for the benefit of all who help to make it? Have you ever thought of what the word radical means? It means going to the root of the matter."

"Ah!" said the duchess, enlightened. "Radical—root. Of course. I see. How clever you are, Ursula."

"Well, that is what the Liberals try to do. They try to get at the root of all the old evils. Their object is to raise the standard of life all round, to make life better worth having for everybody."

"But they'll never do that by raising people out of their proper station and over-feeding them," the duchess declared with conviction. "I do hope Adnam will not make that mistake. I think his men quite dears, some of them. But such an ant-hill! How are you going to pay for it all? And queer glass things everywhere, and bricks, and all that sort of thing. It must cost money. Why, we put up a wall the other day, just a wall, and it cost seven hundred pounds. No wonder everybody is so poor. Race-horses don't pay, you know. They're not like good hunters. They were talking of your hunters last night. In fact, they cost money."

"Adnam's Orchard will pay," Ursula assured her. "It is a pie which will pay everybody who has a finger in it."

"Nobody but you thinks so, dearest Ursula," the duchess solemnly warned her. "The squire is rabid on the subject, and even the duke is doubtful, and Colonel Kedlock says you are all mad—especially Adnam."

"The so-called madness of one man has brought about sane innovations which have made for the happiness of thousands before now," said Adnam's mother tranquilly.

"How very beautiful!" said the duchess, off at another tangent and back again the next moment. "But the duke says—no, not so much the duke, but the squire and Colonel Kedlock"—she waved her little hands deprecatingly. "You would think he was doing something wrong, wicked—Adnam, you know. But of course he's not. He's such a nice fellow. I do admire him. I always think of him and Ella Banks. The duke admires Ella too. He is always very much interested in love affairs. He has books and books about the love affairs of everybody who was anybody. Some of them quite improper."

"Adnam is not in the least in love with anybody at present," Mrs. Pratt said in her gentle, even way.

This way was a mistake with the duchess if you wished to convince her. Her mind, being always all over the place, had

to be got together to make an impression on it. Concussion had this effect. Her husband produced concussion by shouting at critical times. At the noise, her wandering wits jumped to their places and stood to attention for a moment, and then, if quickly done and with emphasis, the impression intended could be made more or less indelible.

CHAPTER XIX

THE men had gone in various moods to the entertainment offered them on Sunday evening at Pratt's Place. Not knowing what to expect there had been much speculation on the subject amongst them during the week. On one occasion Leonard Pettiblock and Luke Banks had been in camp and joined in the discussion.

Corporal George Locke, as Captain of the Camp, greeted Pettiblock when he appeared in the firelight with Luke at his heels: "Is that you, Mr. Pettiblock?" he said. "Good evenin'. What can we do for you?"

"Good evenin'," Pettiblock replied. "I just looked in as I was passing. You're pretty snug 'ere."

"Yes," Locke answered, "at 'ome, as you might say, speakin' for myself, after twenty years o' this sort o' thing." He looked round at the tents, which, just at the moment, shone out white in the flickering firelight.

"Will you sit on the sofie or will you 'ave an armchair?" Fusty Ginger put in.

"A campstool's more my size," Pettiblock rejoined, seating himself cross-legged on the ground. Luke followed his example. "And 'ow's all 'ere?" Pettiblock asked.

"Same's usual," Locke answered for the company. "Nothing fresh astir. But the virtuous reg'larity of our lives is to be interrupted Sunday night by a tomasha of sorts up at the 'ouse."

"'Tato masher?" Pettiblock queried, puzzled by the Hindustani word, "or tomato masher?"

"*Toe-masha*," Locke rejoined with emphasis: "kind of an entertainment—high jinks, you know."

"High jinks!" Luke jibed. "It'll be a sort of a Sunday

school treat, you'll find, your toe-masher; cold tea and a leather medal for the good boys as go to church."

"Church has got nothing to do wi' it," Markham Niel asserted, glad to be able to contradict Luke Banks, whom he disliked. "We were told it would be there for us, take it or leave it."

"Wot would be there for you?" Luke demanded in his truculent tone. The men did not know. "I'll tell you," Luke answered himself. "There'll be hymns about blood and hell as will make you wish you'd never been born. Then you'll get a talking-to, a jawbation of the goody-goody kind to improve you. That's at the bottom of everything that's done for the working man. He 'as to be improved wherever he is, and the object of all this improvement is to teach 'im to do his dooty in that state of life to which it 'as pleased Gawd to call 'im, so as 'is sooperiors may get more work out of 'im fur less money. His betters is always doing so much to improve the working men that they never 'ave time to improve themselves. For w'en they're not improving the pore working man, they 'ave to amuse their pore selves fur the good of their mental 'ealth, an' to restore their nervous systems. The pore working man's mental 'ealth's not supposed to suffer for want of amusement, nor 'is nervous system from anything. All 'e requires is pi-jaw, an' if 'e takes it lyin' down, 'e'll get 'is leather medal and a cup o' tea. Ugh!" he broke off, "it's their bloody patronage that makes me sick."

"Well, we've got to take the patronage as part of the job. At any rate, that's the best way to take it," the melancholy man averred, and the other men nodded resignedly.

They had set their Young Shaver down as goody-goody, and made up their minds to put up with hymns, "jawbations," and all the usual treatment meted out to the "pore working man" for his good, because they feared that the continuation of the job depended upon their submission; and, on this supposition, they mustered on Sunday evening in full force at the back-door of Pratt's Place. Robert Banks received them and led them through the kitchens to the hall. The men filed in as they had filed into church, with the silence and gravity which they supposed to be expected of them. They were depressed, and looked it.

But gravity and depression disappeared at the first glance round the hall, and were succeeded by other expressions, chief among which was surprise. It was all so different from anything that they had anticipated. The rich dark oak, the soft carpet, the crimson curtains draping the high windows, which were wide open, for the night was fine; the wood fire crackling on the open hearth; little tables set about, with pipes and tobacco, tumblers, and cups and saucers on them; comfortable chairs for every one; with a general effect of luxury lent by the subdued light of the lamps. And, most delicate, most highly appreciated attention of all, there was nobody there to embarrass them; they found themselves free to look about them, to choose their seats, to make themselves at home as thoroughly as they pleased.

"Well, crickey!" said the cockney, sinking into a cushioned basket chair; "if this bally show's encored, I'll come again. It's as fine as a music 'all."

"You never saw oak like that in a music 'all," said the carpenter.

"I have," the cockney rejoined, "p'inted on the stige."

The men laughed at this. The pleasant reaction in their mood inclined them to laugh on the smallest provocation.

"What's the programme, Mr. Banks?" Corporal George Locke inquired.

"Mak' yourself comfortable to begin with," Robert answered sententiously. Some of the men were still walking about looking at things; they sat down upon this. "There's to be music," Robert proceeded—"Now for the hymns," the cockney muttered to his neighbour, the melancholy man—"and a reading"—("jawbation," the cockney corrected). "Those that like can smoke. But don't light up yet. Mrs. Pratt is comin'."

"It would be civil to wait for 'er to begin," the irrepressible one politely suggested.

"Didn't know as our Young Shaver was a married man," the melancholy one remarked.

"It's 'is mother, stoopid," the hodman corrected.

"Three cheers for the old gir——" the cockney was beginning, when a door at the end of the hall opened, and Mrs. Pratt appeared in her quiet evening dress, a slender gracious

lady, who won them to courtesy at once with a shy little smile. The men rose.

"Good evening," she said. "Sit down. Pray sit down."

She was followed by her husband and Adnam. Seraph had decided to mark his disapproval of the whole proceeding by not appearing. Mrs. Pratt crossed the hall, and sat down at the grand piano. Adnam followed her. Old Emery took his favourite stand with his back to the fire.

"You're welcome," he said. "You're kindly welcome, all."

"Thank 'ee, sir," and "Thankee, squire," the men responded. When they were all seated again, Adnam addressed them: "Now for the jawbation," the unconvinced cockney whispered to his neighbour. His neighbour said, "Shut up."

"Can any of you men sing a song?" Adnam asked. The men had their eyes on him, but not one of them looked as if he had heard the question. "A good song," Adnam proceeded. "We'll play something first, and then, if you like it, I'll sing myself." A discreet clapping greeted this announcement. "Let those that like smoke. And those that can sing or do anything, let them think it over, and volunteer."

His violin lay on the piano. He took it out of its case. His mother gave him the note, and he began to tune up. "Now!" he said when he was ready. She ran her fingers up and down the keys, struck a brilliant succession of chords, and they were off together, violin and piano, in a wild rollicking quick-step that set the men's feet tapping and their heads nodding in time energetically. Pipes half-filled and matches about to be struck were held in suspense or waved to the measure. The men let themselves go with a will. They marched with the music in spirit up hill and down dale. They did great deeds and reaped great rewards. They were heroes—they were demi-gods. They walked on air; they floated in space; the burden of the flesh fell from them; it was heaven.

The music stopped. A moment of blank silence ensued. Then came the applause, with "Encore! Encore!" and "That's fine!" "That's playin', if you like."

But the performers knew better than to spoil a good effect by repetition. They spoke together, taking no notice of the applause, which gradually died of its own futility. But the men began to relax. They had realised at last that this was a

genuine attempt to entertain them, and the gentleman so often latent in the British workman came out to honour the intention, whether it failed in effect or not. Pipes were primed. There was a buzz of pleasant talk about the hall. And even Fusty Ginger allowed that it was a rum start if they were going to be improved after all.

There was an interval of ten minutes, and then old Emery, who was seated in his great armchair with every appearance of enjoying the occasion as much as anybody, called across the hall to Adnam for a song. "That thing you sang last night," he said.

Mrs. Pratt began to play, the voices were hushed, and Adnam sang. It was a sentimental song, of the kind in which the British workman delights, and there was a sympathetic quality in Adnam's fresh young baritone which sent the music home to the heart. This time there was no escaping the rapturous encore, and he sang again, a song of progress this time, with a resounding chorus which the men took up with a will that did them good.

But none of them was to be persuaded to sing alone. They were all too diffident on this first occasion, and too distrustful of the motives of their entertainers to commit themselves.

The music was varied by a reading which the squire, as the men insisted on calling old Emery, gave them. When he first stood up with the book in his hand, their countenances fell, under the impression that here at last was the improving "jawbation"; but the countenances cleared again while Emery was addressing a few words to them by way of introduction to the reading.

"With your permission, I'll read you a story," he said. "I don't know whether you'll like it or not. I hope you will. I chose it because I like it myself. It's written by an American—"("Good old America!" from the cockney, *sotto voce*)—a woman, I should say. And it's made me feel what we—men who have to do the work of the world—would forget if it wasn't for good women—made me feel human. That's what we men are too apt to forget—that we are all human beings together—neither more nor less; all with the same feelings—hopes, fears, sorrows, joys—human beings—and *something more*. And this is what is good to remember, *the something*

more: the fact that each human being is also an immortal soul. It is good to remember that, whatever our position here on earth, high or low, may be, before the Eternal we rank as equals. We are all men, nothing but men; and it is according to what we are—as men—that we shall be judged. They say we may lose our immortal souls. I believe we may. We destroy them when we cease to be human—humane. The food of the soul is love, and so long as we have in us the power to love our neighbour as ourselves, our souls survive—no matter what we do. The vilest deed may be wiped out by self-sacrifice, the sacrifice of love, if we have the will, and the time is given us. You will see here”—he opened the book. “The story,” he added in an altered voice, “the story is called ‘Zerviah Hope.’”

The fine presence of the speaker, the mellow voice, the feeling with which the simple expressive words were uttered, gripped the men by the heart. Those who had been seated with their backs to him turned their chairs round. If this was to be an improving “jawbation,” it was not of the kind they resented, and they set themselves to listen with interest, on the watch for new developments. As the reading proceeded, several of them covered their eyes with their hands as if the light hurt them. The emotional Fusty Ginger took out a large white pocket-handkerchief, blew his nose aggressively, and automatically put the handkerchief under his arm as it might have been a table napkin; and automatically he withdrew it from time to time to wipe his eyes, as he had been wont to wipe irrelevant drops from marble-topped tables. Most of the men sat with their eyes riveted on the reader, unconscious of their surroundings; and down the hard cheeks of some of them the great tears slowly rolled, unheeded. Old Emery had chosen well. There is a strange delight in such emotion, in the tears that well up to relieve the softened heart when the depth of our better nature is stirred to enthusiasm by the story of some great deed of love. It is a poor and sordid nature that is not capable of responding sympathetically when this chord is struck. For those who have the power of rising in response to the call of the heart, the moment is a great moment, and the joy of it is fuller, richer, more grateful than any other joy. Towards the last, the men were gathered in spirit round

Zerviah Hope, and, when the end came, there was a great hush in the hall. No applause could have been so eloquent as the silence, which remained unbroken for a perceptible time after old Emery had closed the book. It was as if the men were still listening, spellbound. Certainly they were still feeling. The first movement was of the hands that went up to wipe their eyes; the first sound was a suppressed sob. Fusty Ginger was the first to find his voice. "Thanks, squire," he said, and "Thankee, sir," was echoed from all sides of the hall amidst much blowing of noses. It was old Emery himself who finally relieved the tension.

"Now," he said, and the lights seemed to go up. "Now, I think, a little light refreshment will do us all good."

A faint shuffling of feet greeted this suggestion, and Robert Banks withdrew, taking Fusty Ginger with him and three of the other men. They returned presently, carrying trays on which were pots of fragrant coffee, jugs of frothy milk, steaming hot, and bottles of lager beer. The men took kindly to these forms of light refreshment, but especially to the coffee and milk, following the example of the family.

Adnam sat down to his coffee at a little table close to the piano, at which a solitary man was already seated, an insignificant looking little man whom Adnam knew by sight, as he knew all his men, but had never spoken to or thought of except to the extent of remembering that his name was Mickleham. He was a nondescript sort of little man, with a short scrubby beard, evidently of recent growth, and of much coarser texture than that of his small moustache; a man apparently without personality, who had made no impression at all upon the camp, good or bad. The other men neither sought his company nor avoided him; they just knew that he was there, as they knew that the camp furniture was there, for some useful purpose which affected them only as other necessary parts of the equipment of the camp affected them. Had he disappeared from amongst them they would certainly not have missed him, and he would have left no record by which they could have recalled him to their minds. Adnam reached to the piano for his violin, and laid it down on the table close to this man. Some of the company, noting the action, thought he was going to play again, and began to applaud. Adnam made a pretence of

polishing his bow elaborately with a silk pocket-handkerchief, not because it required polishing, but because the occupation helped him to ignore the expectant attitude of his audience. Mrs. Pratt, who was still sitting at the piano, twisted herself round on the revolving stool to speak to her son, and found herself face to face with Mickleham. Glancing at him casually, she saw only what everybody else had seen, a very ordinary little man, in whose appearance there was nothing to arrest attention. It happened, however, that just as she looked at him, Adnam pushed his violin towards him, and there came over the nondescript little man a change so magical, it could not have amazed her more had he been an inanimate object suddenly come to life. His attitude, which had hitherto been apathetic, became alert, his face lit up, and his hands flashed into prominence. It was as if they had become the most important part of him. Sunburned and roughened by labour they were, but there was no mistaking them as they now showed themselves obtrusively—eager, magnetic, enthusiastic, nervous hands, not the hands of a workman, essentially the hands of an artist. Looking at the violin greedily he hardly seemed able to keep them off it.

“A fine instrument,” he said, catching Adnam’s eye.

Adnam nodded. It passed through his mind that the speaker was Mickleham, a man who always obeyed like a machine which responds without feeling to the power that works it. His mother saw deeper.

“You are a musician,” she said. “You will play to us.”

Mickleham reached out a nervous hand towards the violin, and hurriedly drew it back.

“I have no instrument—here,” he jerked out.

“You must send for it,” Mrs. Pratt said. “In the meantime—” she looked at her son. He raised his eyebrows inquiringly. “Adnam”—she spoke as if she were calling him from a distance—“you will lend your violin to——” she would not say “this man,” and did not know his name.

“To Mickleham?” Adnam asked. He evidently objected. Lend his pet violin to be tortured by this common labourer! What was his mother thinking of?

Mickleham looked up at him.

“You will lend your violin to this musician,” his mother reiterated with emphasis. “He will be good enough to play to

us. You will play us something that we shall all understand," she said to Mickleham. It seemed an order rather than a request as she pronounced it.

Mickleham seized the instrument, and held out his hand for the bow. Adnam, as if impelled, gave it to him, then looked at his mother reproachfully. She took no notice of him. She was looking at Mickleham. Once the instrument was in his possession, he handled it tenderly, as we handle the Beloved. He tried the strings, then nodded to Mrs. Pratt for the note by which to tune it, and, having tuned it, he tried it again. Looking at Adnam, he played a few detached phrases, *piano*, *crescendo*, *fortissimo*; stopped—and smiled an inquiry. Adnam, enlightened, made a gesture of relief; recognising the musician, he forgot the common labourer.

Mickleham looked at Mrs. Pratt to signify that he was ready, awaiting her orders.

"Play them something they will understand—something that will help them. *Make* them understand."

He leant over and talked to her in an undertone rapidly for some minutes, making strange gestures with his hands at times, as if he were playing on a keyboard. She listened intently, trying to comprehend, and every now and then she would play a few bars tentatively, looking up at him the while for his opinion. At first he shook his head at her attempts, then he began to nod it, and nodded it more and more rapidly as she proceeded. He was satisfied. She had caught the idea.

With a final nod he stood up. Adnam rapped on the table. The preliminaries at the piano had been so long in coming to a head that the men, tired of attending to them, had fallen into conversation among themselves, but on Adnam's imperative knocking the buzz of talk suddenly ceased. Adnam stood up to make himself heard.

"Mickleham is going to play to us," he said.

"Good old Mickleham!" Fusty Ginger exclaimed, amid some half-hearted applause.

The men expected nothing from Mickleham worth listening to, but being in a good humour as well as on their best behaviour, they deemed it "the game" to encourage him. He stood with the violin held in position, the bow by his side. "Realise," he said. "Think." And stopped short.

The men thought he had broken down. Some laughed,

some clapped, some cried "Try again." He shook his bow at them fiercely. "Silence!" he shouted. "I told you to think." He stretched out the bow and held it suspended over them, as if ready to strike them if they disobeyed. In sheer astonishment the men kept still. There was another pause, and again he told them to "realize," to "think." He gave them a moment to make the effort, then continued: "We are here in the country." He raised the bow and swept it round with a large gesture.

The men were inclined to laugh at the obviousness of this remark, but the laugh did not come off. Mickleham on his feet, violin in hand, addressing them in a voice they had never before heard, and in the language of a master, was unexpected enough to excite them to full attention. Adnam also felt a shock of surprise when the man began to speak, not merely because his voice was good and resonant, but because it was the voice of a man of refinement, a cultivated man—a gentleman.

Fusty Ginger, who had been staring hard at him from the moment he spoke, with a puzzled expression, suddenly slapped his knee, and exclaimed. "Of course it is!"

"What is?" the melancholy man asked eagerly.

"Summat I keeps to myself," said Fusty.

"Of course you know that you are in the country," Mickleham pursued. "You know it so well that you simply don't think about it. There is nothing to be said about a thing so obvious, so undeniable. Now what I want is that you should think about it. I am going to set the country to music—we are, Mrs. Pratt and I." He bowed to Mrs. Pratt. She responded with a smile. "Music is not a foreign language. It is a universal language. There are very few people who haven't it in them—something of it—very few to whom it does not come naturally in a greater or lesser degree like hearing and seeing. Some, of course, there are with no music in them, as there are deaf people and dumb people and blind people; but they, happily, are the exception. And some people only have music in a rudimentary degree, while others are born with the faculty full fledged. But even when we have it in us, we do not begin by appreciating music at its best any more than we begin by understanding all that we see. The

faculty must be educated. We require little aids at first to improve our comprehension. I offer you one of these little aids when I ask you to remember where we are. This is the country. There"—he swung the bow back towards the window—"there is the dark pine wood. Light airs sigh among the branches intermittently"—he drew a soft indeterminate sound from the violin. "Beyond is the sea, the great unresting sea—immensity in endless motion. The winds and the waves fill the air with sound that is incessant. But this incessant sound of the winds and the waves is unobtrusive. The accustomed ear pays no heed to it. It is eternity made audible—too big a thing for man to keep in his consciousness always. But out of this groundwork occasional sounds do attract attention sharply. They detach themselves from it and rise above it. Now I want you to feel that it is night, dark night. I want you to watch for the dawn, to listen for the sounds that herald the dawn; for the sounds which announce that it is day again; for the cessation of sound that comes at twilight; the holy calm; the quietude that is so good and beautiful. Man's futile labour has once more ceased, the weary round has been once more trodden, as it will be again and again. But not hopelessly. There is something always ahead, something to look forward to and to live for—something worth having. There is the deep, dark night with its voices, which soothe with the soothing of silence; the winds and the waves that, without resting, give rest; and the longed-for oblivion of sleep."

His voice sank impressively on the last words. The men had listened, gaping, with open mouths. Insensibly the speaker had stirred in them emotions that were new to them; strange pleasurable emotions, half of wonder and half of awe. When he ceased speaking they drew a deep breath. But he gave them no time to recover from the effect of his oratory. For a moment he stood with his head bent and his bow dropped to his side. Then he straightened himself, pulled himself together, and, raising the bow, nodded to Mrs. Pratt, as accompanist. She swung herself round on the piano stool to the keyboard, ran her nimble fingers over the keys, then glanced up at him. He nodded again. She knew what he wanted. He waved the bow. "One!" and they were off. The notes flowed from her fingers, a continuous undercurrent of sound, aiding but never

dominating the violin. The wind was soughing, the waves breaking, the darkness of night enfolded them. Far away a cock crowed, a dog howled mournfully—distant sounds of the night which enhanced the stillness. An eerie feeling came over the men. It was as if the lights had been lowered, and they glanced about them furtively, expecting to see something uncanny. There was a throb in the music to which the throb in their pulses kept time. Then by degrees the effect of darkness was over; the first shiver of the cold grey dawn had come; another cock, near at hand, crowed loudly. The men looked at each other and smiled. They understood that. The eerie feeling passed off, leaving them expectant in a different sense. And now other sounds with which they were familiar came crowding thickly. "Them's the birds," the hodman whispered to his neighbour, who, with his eyes on the player, made an impatient gesture to silence him. From out of the indistinct twittering came the call of the yellow-hammer, "A-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese," several times repeated. The countrymen would have applauded, but suspended the impulse for fear of losing the distant warble of a blackbird, the clear intermittent call of a thrush, and then, falling from the blue, and so high above that involuntarily they looked up, the lark! And always, when the more articulate sound ceased, the vacuum was filled by the vagrant wind and the toiling sea.

It was here that Adnam lost consciousness of the music. So far he had listened. The player's masterly command of his instrument had surprised and interested him, although he despised cheap technical effects. To attach music to a definite idea it to chain it to the earth, to deprive it of its transcendental quality, of the power to express that which is beyond expression in words. Music, when it moves us aright, is a great uplifting of the spirit, and to put it to any other use is to degrade it. So Adnam believed. But he had forgotten the slow process of education by which he had come to the knowledge; therefore he had considered performances of this kind a hindrance rather than a help to the right appreciation. It was talking down to the bad taste of the ignorant instead of helping them up. This is where Adnam was when he lost consciousness of the music as music, and awoke to a stirring in himself, as of great thoughts untrammelled by words. There

is in all of us, though for the most part latent, a yearning sense of something that eludes us, yet means more to us than life and death, because it goes further than life and death. "Some people call it Nature, others call it God"—and come nearer to expressing it; but nearer still is "Eternity" and the sense of our own immortality. This yearning underlies every trivial detail of our daily lives, and is apt to become importunate at any moment. So the incessant sound of the sea and of the vagrant wind remained in the music, and lapsed, and reasserted itself. The men understood when the cock crowed. They looked up involuntarily to listen to the lark. They tumbled down to earth again at the braying of an ass; they greeted the gentleman with smiles of recognition, with nods of appreciation, but in silence, for fear of losing the next effect. Cows came lowing from a distance, the milkmaid sang; there were voices and the rumbling of heavy carts. Then a bell, a little tinkling bell, calling the children to school; a gay measure that sets the feet tapping, and merry bells—a wedding; strange solemn chords, serious faces, and a bell that tolled—death and burial. Hurry, skurry, loud clamour, and a wild bell—fire! The whole round of life; this the men understood, by this they were amused; but this was not all. Gradually there came to them a sense of something that went deeper, something beyond.

Composers label their compositions. "This is the sea," one says, and gives you sounds as of the sea, of wavelets plangent on a sandy shore. "This is a storm," and you hear it rage. . . . That is the limit of the clever composer. The great one, when he gives you the actual, gives you also the spiritual. It is his to use music both as "an exponent of life and a divine influence." He makes you feel what the sea makes you feel. It is the sea itself in its effect rather than in its actuality; not the sound of it merely, but the inexpressible haunting sense—of immensity, of the infinite.

Youth is apt to be arrogant and self-important; it has an especially exaggerated opinion of the importance of its own little learning. Adnam in this respect was an exception. One of the first things he had learnt was how little he knew, and he went about with eyes and ears open, listening and observing with keen intelligence. Hence he was never long at fault. He perceived that this music, by appealing to the men through

what they understood, was carrying them on and up, was insensibly educating their faculty and increasing it. He saw this in the faces of some of them—not in all, of course, though all were listening intently; but even to have taken one up by these easy steps to a better comprehension was something done, and a great and good something too. The expression on the faces varied. Most of them looked pleased and interested; they were trying to follow the story, watching for recognisable points. But some, with wide open, sightless eyes, were steeped in feeling, without thought, exalted, and heard nothing consciously. By degrees the turmoil of life subsided, tranquillity came again, and the sougling sigh of the wind, the flow and break and lapse of tireless waves on a sandy shore announced the night, the beautiful still night. And then—silence.

Towards the end the yearning melody cunningly interwoven throughout had grown less elusive. As the hush of night descended it became fainter yet more distinct, and the men leant forward in their chairs so as to lose no softest note of the strain. Their concentration was abruptly dissipated when the music stopped. They straightened themselves as if they had been told to sit up, and clapped—just one round: "Thank you, that's enough." They were not equal to more at the moment. For the performance had been an experience, and they showed their appreciation of it not so much by applauding it as by falling to at once to discuss it.

The little man laid the violin on the table, sat down, wiped his forehead, and sank into insignificance again. He was like one of those insects that become invisible directly they alight. When Adnam, giving him the best he knew of in the way of applause, exclaimed impulsively, "You are a musician!" he merely nodded, as if to an obvious assertion needing no comment. But when Mrs. Pratt a moment later turned to him with the same words, but uttered in a very different tone, he looked up and bowed.

"It comes to me at times," he said.

"Then you are not always in prison," she answered eagerly. "You escape from your mind—poor mind that is our jailer. You do not need to think—you know. You are in the light, you can see."

"I have my moments," he said.

"At command?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "Though sometimes——" He stopped short. Adnam was speaking to the men. His idea had been to entertain his guests after their kind, and there was no doubt that he had succeeded: "We hope to see you all here again next Sunday," he was saying, "and if any of you will contribute to the evening's amusement we shall be glad. There's a whole week of evenings in which to prepare. Mickleham has set an excellent example. We have to thank him for a rare treat" (the men acknowledged this heartily). "We will separate now, but before we go, in my father's name I invite you all to supper. You will find supper laid in the servants' hall. We wish you all good night."

The men gave him good night, and then, following their foreman again, filed out of the hall.

It was a substantial supper which they found awaiting them, with a liberal supply of good beer, and no one to be a check upon them. This had a good effect. Patrons to watch them feed was what they expected; the absence of patrons removed their last lingering suspicions.

"I give in," said Fusty Ginger, under the genial influence of supper. "I bin expecting to find this whole set out too sweet to be wholesome. I ses to myself, 'This occasion's got to be improved some'ow afore we goes.' But I give in. I owns up. It's bin something like from beginning to end. A reg'lar s'prise party."

This reminded the men. They looked round for Mickleham, but he was not there. He had been seen, as they left the hall, sitting in close conversation with the lady of the house.

"He's a dark 'oss, or I'm much mistaken, is Mr. Mickleham," the corporal observed.

"Mr. Mickleham—you're right," said Niel the gardener. "That man's no labourer."

"No," said the carpenter, "there's more to Mr. Mickleham than's bin let out. Did you 'ear 'ow 'e spoke?"

"Oh, that!" the irreverent Fusty exclaimed. "Just 'is patter. He's bin on the 'alls, you may be sure, and all that's in the way of business. Just patter. I've waited on that chap, I'm sure, many a night after the performance." Fusty's imagination apparently began to be active here, at least so the

men supposed. "I didn't recognise him at first. He looks mighty different in evenin' dress. He always was partial to oysters. But not stout. Chablis was his figure. He'd be a rich man then. But they 'as their ups and downs like other men." Imagination worked hard here. "Gen'ly downed by weemin they are. Spends all their money on 'em, an' then comes debt. Mr. Mickleham's in 'iding, I'll swear."

"Well," said the corporal, "so long's he plays to us, and patters, he may hide here. No one'll tell."

On the way back to camp the men all "owned up," like Fusty, that it had been a "reg'lar s'prise party" of the right sort. But Luke Banks was not to be converted by the accounts he heard of the entertainment.

"You ought to 'a' bin there, Banks," one of the men said to him. "You'd 'a' felt like a gentleman for once."

"Ay, you tell me!" said Luke. "But if you believe as it's all going to be apple-pie and custard and nothing to pay, you're greener than grass. He'll have his profit out of you, you'll see. The employer as doesn't get the better of the working man when he can isn't in good health. Or else," Luke added, "he's a crank and bound to go bankrupt."

In view of Adnam's personality, which continued to puzzle them, the men had nothing to say to this.

"How old might our Young Shaver be?" the corporal asked Robert Banks one day.

"Well," Robert answered in his careful, deliberate way, "counting by years, he's not yet twenty-two; counting in savvy, I should say that he's about a hundred."

The corporal nodded as though to intimate that he thought the computation reasonable. "Ay, I'd 'av guessed it at that," he said.

It was about this time that the men left off calling Adnam "Our Young Shaver." The sobriquet was felt to be inadequate. Fusty Ginger sought satisfaction for his impudence in a variety of other terms, but none of them "caught on." It was Markham Niel who finally summed up the general sentiment on the subject.

"Eh," he said, his telling Scotch accent giving double weight to his words. "Eh, but he's Boss by nature, is that young man Pratt. What for would ye be denying him the

name? There's nothing to lose by giving a man his due, and pretty well always something to gain. Give this young man his right as Boss by nature, and you gain the great advantage of understanding him. Between employer and employee there's nothing so helpful as a good understanding; and wise men will lay hold of any help to a good understanding that may offer."

The men accepted this pronouncement as good in equity, and thus was Adnam promoted Boss in his own Orchard.

CHAPTER XX

ELLA BANKS put away her work early one afternoon and went out. She had an object, of course; two, in fact. She wanted to see how Alice and Emily Ryecote, to whom she was teaching the finer kinds of lace-making, were getting on, and she also wanted fresh air. She had been sitting too close at her work of late, and had begun to feel a little out of sorts; but as she was a favourite of Nature's by reason of her love and faith in her, small warnings were enough. In that particular she was born wise. To risk injuring her health and thereby spoil her power to enjoy to the full any pleasure in life that came her way, had always seemed to her to be the height of folly.

Her cleverness with her fingers was hereditary. There had been lace-makers in her family on the mother's side for generations. When she was left motherless at a few weeks old, Ellery Banks, who had three little boys by his first wife already on his hands, appealed to Ella's grandmother, her mother's mother, for help to bring her up.

By way of reply the grandmother, who was a woman of great decision of character, had come herself promptly in a carrier's cart, and the next day had taken the baby back with her by the same conveyance to her cottage home on the other side of the county. It was the happiest solution of the difficulty at the moment, but Ellery had no intention of billeting the child permanently on her mother's relations. He paid regularly and well for her clothes, schooling, and keep; visited

her as often as his laborious life permitted, and looked forward to having her at home with him. The years slipped by, however, and first of all he left her with her grandmother "for a bit longer" because she was being so well brought up; then, later, when the grandmother was becoming old and feeble, he had felt that it would be cruel and unfair to take from her the delight of her heart just when the child was old enough to repay in some sort all the care and kindness which her grandmother had lavished upon her. In the meantime he had married again, and the difficulties between Ella and her step-mother settled the question until her grandmother's death, when there was nothing for it but to have her at home. It was to this grandmother that Ella owed the formation of her mind (in so far as the mind of so young a girl can be said to be formed), and her refined habits; her enterprise, and the direction of her ambition. A woman of strong character, the grandmother, having lost her husband in her youth, had lived her long widowhood very much alone, maintaining herself by lace-making, much respected by her educated neighbours, but rather feared than respected by the ignorant, who found something to suspect in her self-sufficiency and extreme reserve. Had she lived a century earlier they would probably have burnt her for a witch; not on account of her ugliness, however, for she had been a remarkably handsome woman till the day of her death. Ella's mother was her only child, and a disappointment to her in that she had inherited none of her strength of character. She had been extremely pretty, but of a different type, the mother being dark with regular features, the daughter childishly fair with one of those indeterminate faces that lose their charm when the first freshness of the colouring goes, leaving the irregularities exposed and emphasised. The mother had understood the child and done her best for her, but the child had never appreciated her mother. The small-minded resent discipline; every little check upon them is a grievance at the moment and is afterwards remembered as a wrong; they never grow up to see, as the finer natures do, that it was good for them and necessary. And the mother was a disciplinarian. On this account therefore it was inevitable that the daughter should be discontented at home and make her escape if she could. She was idle, luxury-

loving and selfish, and service as it was represented to her by a chance acquaintance, a smart lady's maid ("Good packer, hair-dresser, dressmaker, accustomed to travelling"), offered better opportunities for self-indulgence than lace-making at home under the eye of a mother who would not tolerate shirking. With the help of her friend she had obtained her first and only situation, a subordinate place in the same family, where she would be under her friend, who promised to "show her the ropes," "give her lots of wrinkles," see that she got a good share of left-off "togs," and put her in the way of "bettering" herself quickly. Her mother explained the likely drawbacks to the position, but vainly, because she was her mother, who was always worrying, and only wanted to keep her at home to get all the work she could out of her for her own benefit. She told her so, and that settled the question. Mothers can be managed by various means. They can be easily hurt for one thing, and then made so happy again, some of them, by demonstrations of affection that they will deny you nothing. Those are the softer kinds. The best way with a decided mother is to cut her to the heart and at the same time to rouse her indignation. She will be too proud to show that she is wounded, so you will not have your feelings harrowed; and she will also be angry enough to let you have your own way if she foresees that it will entail upon you the punishment you deserve. That was how it was that Ella's mother went into service, made acquaintance with the ways of the world, married Ellery Banks, and died at Ella's birth.

The grandmother's hurt was healed by the baby. Every trait for the absence of which she had sorrowed in her own daughter, developed in her grandchild. Never was compensation more perfect. The two understood each other from the first. There were battles, of course, for Ella was anything but docile. In fact, both were born fighters, but they had the instinct of fair fight also in common; neither would have taken a mean advantage. The child's splendid spirit was a joy to the grandmother, who knew the value of a strong will, and laboured not to break but to direct Ella's, and to train her to use it to good purpose.

Ella inherited the lace-pillow which her mother had impatiently cast aside. She delighted in the work and soon

learnt all that her grandmother could teach her. Here again the old lady showed herself capable of educating in the best sense of the word, for whilst teaching Ella the practical part of the work thoroughly, she developed her taste. She taught Ella lace-making as a branch of art, more important for its beauty than for its value in the market, because beauty is of more service to mankind than money. Any vulgar person may have money. It is the power to make beautiful that is rare, a thing not to be purchased, a great gift, which in itself confers upon the possessor distinction high above any that the world can confer. So Ella learnt to feel herself dignified by her work. When she first went home there were jars with her stepmother, who accused her of being a fine lady, to which Ella at fifteen, with tears of mortification in her eyes, had retorted indignantly: "I'm not a fine lady. I'm a lace-maker"—as who should say, "I'm a queen."

The county had once been famous for its lace, but the industry had begun to decline two hundred years before Ella was born. With the rout of the Catholics, the decadence of the high church, and the spread of puritan ugliness, the demand had ceased in the quarters where exquisite work had been best appreciated; and later the vulgar commercial spirit which begrudges a living wage to the artist, is gluttonous of bargains and bulk, and too depraved in taste to delight in the perfect morsel when the bigger bit is to be had for the money and makes more show, had acted disastrously on the supply. The time of the coarse quick workers with their easy inferior designs had come, and the patience and skill which the working of wonders necessitates had been allowed to die out for want of sustenance. But the tradition survived, and had been handed on to Ella by her grandmother, with the love of beauty which inspires enthusiasm in art. The tradition worked in Ella's mind. All that her contemporaries could teach her was not enough for her, was but a beginning, in fact, she knew of so much more to be learnt. She pursued the subject all over the county. She found old women who remembered hearing their grandmothers talk of what *their* grandmothers had seen done in the good old times. The tradition survived amongst them, but the knowledge and skill had been allowed to lapse. She tried to find specimens. At one time every prosperous

farmer's wife had had her little store of good lace, more treasured than worn. They were a stationary class at that time, and held to strict conventions in dress, which allowed the possession of finery that might be exhibited with pride but not put on. But these collections were dispersed when travelling became easy, and strict rules about dress were relaxed. The farmer's wife now began to wear her lace herself, and her daughters to marry out of the county, and take their share of it to other parts of the country. For three years Ella sought and inquired, walking long distances for the purpose, patiently following up every little clue, and at the same time, as often happens, overlooking just what she wanted because it was close at hand. The family most likely to have old lace in its keeping was the one that had been longest and thriven best on the land, the yeoman family of Pratt. But Ella had never thought of them in that connection, and it was only incidentally that she mentioned the subject to Adnam one day by way of accounting for a fit of fatigue following upon one of her long fruitless walks in search of what she wanted. She told him of her determination to recover the lost beauties of her art, and of her belief that she could do so if only she could find some of the perfect specimens which she felt sure must still be in existence. Adnam, keenly interested in everything, and always practical, gave his mind to the subject at once. He thought of his mother's laces, and consulted her about Ella's project and difficulties. And she was the very person to consult, not only because she had in her store just what Ella required, but also because she knew a good deal about lace herself and had excellent taste. It was this interest in common that first brought the two together.

Ella's real troubles only began with the finding of those specimens of the antique fairy web which it was her ambition to reproduce in all its delicacy and beauty. Up to that time she had been earning trifling sums a week with her pillow, but now she had to give herself up entirely to the task of discovering, with such knowledge of lace-making as she already possessed, though chiefly by eye and intelligence, the intricate details of the diaphanous fabric; and even when she had mastered these, after many failures, and much broken, entangled and wasted thread, she still required facility, and had to prac-

tise and practise, with much more waste of the precious thread which was so hard to come by in her penniless state, before she had perfected herself enough to turn her toil to account in money. But she persevered courageously, and in spite of the disheartenments usually inflicted by families on the one enterprising member who dares to strike out in some new direction. The men said little. They took it that she was not going to be much good at work, and resigned themselves. For them there was always the comfort of her grace and beauty, in which, man-like, they took an honest pride, and for which, also man-like, they were prepared to pay liberally. For her unfortunate stepmother, aching with overwork herself, and always anxious, there was no such compensation. Ella's beauty, in fact, only added to her irritation, for she took what seemed to her to be Ella's "contrariness" for the outcome of conscious beauty—fine ladyism and conceit. Silence is a terrible weapon, offensive and defensive; and it is also frequently a terrible mistake. If Ella had explained what her project was, what the chances of success, and what the inevitable result, she would have won her stepmother over, and the good woman would have helped instead of hindering her. But Ella was hampered and blinded by the false pride of youth and inexperience. She appreciated her stepmother as little as her stepmother appreciated her. In education and intelligence she was Ella's inferior; and incessant domestic drudgery, far beyond her strength, had hardened her manners; but she was not soured. It should be taken into account that when the best of a woman is expended in a brave effort to endure, there is nothing left to be pleasant with. Love and devotion are at the bottom of such endurance, and will make their gracious appearance at a word—the word of appreciation which, in these cases, is so seldom, and generally so grudgingly, given. Ella at the time saw nothing of this in her stepmother, and it was easier for her to stand aloof than to descend to her level (which is what she would have felt herself doing) by taking her into her confidence. So she held her head high, too high, and held her tongue. When the head is held too high, those intimate details which happen under our eyes, and go to the making of the most important concerns of our lives, are out of sight. Ella, with her head up, because she missed these data, missed also the impulse to be

kind which they would naturally have inspired, and brought upon herself all those petty annoyances, the outcome of misapprehension, that so surely tend to devitalise even the strongest. The tormentors in such cases are blamed without pity when a little inquiry might have proved that, to begin with, they were themselves the tormented. Ella's stepmother was hard on herself afterwards, when she understood, but Ella did her justice eventually. She saw that the fault was primarily her own. She should have explained. But then she did not know, and there was no one to tell her. The Book of Wisdom is not open to many in their youth; we have most of us to make our own copies as we go along. Plans of action go in pairs, the one in opposition to the other, and the difficulty is to discriminate. There are occasions when, if the right word had been spoken at the right time, a disaster would have been averted; and there are other occasions when, if nothing had been said, no tragedy would have occurred.

The potted experience of the ages, which declares that "silence is golden," and "least said soonest mended," was against discrimination in Ella's case. She had every excuse for her reticence; but so had her stepmother, in the dark, for her exasperation. They both suffered, and unfairly enough, for their mistakes; Ella at the time, when she was nagged and worried, denied the cup of tea that would have reinvigorated her, and bitterly reproached for her seeming self-indulgence when she was caught sitting for a moment in apparent idleness with her precious eyes closed to rest them; her stepmother for ever afterwards from the bitter ache of remorse.

But there was compensation in the effort each now habitually made to be good to the other. Ella on her way out that afternoon called to her stepmother: "I've had to put my work away. Eyes smarting. I'm going out for the good of my health."

"You do right, my dear," her stepmother replied, coming to the door to see her off, and peering up anxiously into her eyes. "I'll make you some camomile tea to be cold against you come back to bathe your eyes with."

"That'll be good," said Ella; "you're a dear."

"Get out wi' your coaxing," Mrs. Banks rejoined. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to arrange with Alice and Emily Rycote to come here for lessons in the lace-making."

Not so very long ago she had been daily tormented with the fact that Alice and Emily Rycote were making twelve or thirteen shillings a week on their pillows while she was not making a penny; but she had forgotten all that. She was too generous by nature to triumph in turning the tables. Her stepmother had forgotten it too for the moment. Ella's words had alarmed her.

"You're never goin' to teach them gels your work!" she exclaimed, "and make it so common, it'll be not worth that to you," and she snapped her fingers.

"It is too good a thing to keep all to myself," said Ella. "Suppose I died? The art might be lost again for ever. Besides, I must help Robert if I can. He and Emily might be married if she could work like me."

"Oh, she'll never do that, nor none of them either," Mrs. Banks declared confidently.

"Then don't be an anxious old goose," said Ella. "I have not much hope myself of helping her to do more than improve upon what she can do at present. But, anyway, you needn't be afraid. All the lace-workers in the country couldn't make enough of my lace to satisfy all the lords and ladies who will want it."

"Lords, indeed! What would lords be wanting with your lace?"

"To give it to their ladies, of course. And may I always have the lords to deal with! They'd never be mean when it came to the price."

"No, not if you was the saleswoman," her stepmother rejoined. "They'll pay just to see you."

"I'll remember that," said Ella laughing, "and add a high percentage on to the price for the time I am on view."

"Get out, you vain hussy," Mrs. Banks chuckled. "I believe you'd do it. You're capable of anything——"

"In the way of turning an honest penny," Ella put in.

"Yes, honest, I allow," Mrs. Banks conceded. "There's that to be said for you."

"Then kiss me good-bye with a smile, as if you loved me."

"I don't know whether I love you or not," her stepmother said, but kissed her kindly all the same, and wished her good luck and safe home. She stood on the doorstep, with her sleeves rolled up, wiping her red hands on her coarse apron, and watched Ella, but not out of sight—that would have been unlucky. Then she went back to the kitchen, and began to make the camomile tea. "It's queer," she thought, as she put the kettle on to boil, "it's queer, but it's true as Gospel, God forgive me. I don't know whether I love that girl or not. But I ought to love her, that I do know."

It was a three miles' walk from Red Rose Farm on the Pointz property to the Ryecotes' cottage by Castlefield Saye, and Ella was prepared to enjoy every step of the way. The late afternoon was lovely. It was towards sundown, and already the radiance of the sky was mellowing, the air was cool and crisp. Ella seemed to have the world to herself, and stepped out buoyantly, rejoicing in the sense of freedom born of the wide solitude. At a sharp turn of the road, however, her elation was checked with a shock. She had come face to face with Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz.

"How do you do?" he said, taking off his hat.

It was the first time they had met, but evidently he thought no "by your leave, please," or other form of introduction necessary to the daughter of a common tenant-farmer. Ella's pride and resentment rose in a crimson flush to her forehead. Captain Pointz mistook her indignation for pleased confusion, her heightened colour for the blush of shyness which is flattering to a man's vanity, and added with a smile, meant to be fascinating: "Where are you going to, my pretty maid?"

Ella had stopped short of necessity, since he barred the path. Involuntarily she resorted to her most effective means of offence and defence. She looked up at him with eyes of grave inquiry, and held her tongue.

Algernon could hardly believe it, but he felt himself snubbed. Still, she made no attempt to pass him, and that was encouraging. You can't expect a girl in her station to know what to do when she is first noticed by a man in his; her natural gratification has to acquire a means of expression. He excused her.

He was a fair man, with a coarse biscuit-coloured moustache, white eyelashes, and a nose that challenged observation. In colouring he took after his father's family, but he was tall like his mother, and in character was the product of her social ambition. Morals he had none, and his manners, also like his mother's, were variable, the uncertain manners of the ill-bred, who, being without the instinct which makes courtesy obligatory on all occasions, have no control of their tempers, and are wont to exhibit in gusts all the disagreeable things they feel. Algernon was essentially a mongrel, but not of the genial, intelligent type, with many amusing traits; rather of the objectionable cur-kind, cunning, cringing, fawning, treacherous, equally ready to lick or to bite the hand held out to him. His way with women was caressing, a good way with the amiable and obtuse, the dependent spirits; but foolish when it came to dealing with Lena Kedlock and Ella Banks, both independent spirits and penetrating, more prone to ridicule than to admire, and to suspect than to trust—armed, that is to say, at every point with the instinct of self-preservation. Lena called him the Blond Beast, and despised him, but made use of him when it suited herself all the same. To Ella he was physically repulsive. He made her think of some animal of the stoat kind, a small beast that lives on the blood of others and kills, for delight in killing, many more than it requires for food. She would have avoided the creature if she could, and, in any case, being very much a woman, she would hate to hurt him; but that did not make it safe to molest her. She had a shuddering horror of black beetles, but if one crossed her path, she would crush it, and with all the more force because of the effort she had to make to compel her shrinking nerves to do the deed at all. So, if a man pestered her with unwelcome attentions, it was in her nature to make him suffer for it.

Her unresponsive silence disconcerted him. "Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" is not an opening from which you can jump off into conversation of any kind unaided. He grew rather red himself, and to cover his discomfiture, tapped his boot with his stick, ogled his best, and took cover under a fatuous "Eh, what?"

Ella saw her way. "I did not speak," she said.

"No, that's just it," he exclaimed, catching at this straw. "But do speak now. Be kind to me. You would if you knew what a lonely beggar I am, without a congenial soul to speak to, and nothing to do."

"I should have thought there was a great deal for you to do," she answered with a deceitful smile, "and a great many people to speak to."

"What is there to do?" he asked. "Who is there to speak to?"

"As a future landowner," she suggested. "There must be much to learn about the management of a great property, if it is to be successfully managed. And then there are the tenants, common people, not congenial, of course, but still, as a duty—It is said to be an advantage to the landlord himself to know them personally."

As with other girls, her instinct was to try her power to beguile, but not in the usual way. She meant to beguile him into an awkward because unnatural pose.

Algernon fell into the trap. He shot out a shirt-cuff, and, with lordly assumption and plausible cant, struck out in the way she had indicated. Feeling that he was wrong with her somehow, and must set himself right or get no further, he fluently made profession of the principles she appeared to admire, and at the same time tried ingeniously to show good cause for his first advance: "Of course, you are right," he said. "That was why I ventured to speak to you. As a duty. It seems to me that landlords and tenants have a right to know each other personally. It is a business relationship to begin with, but it should be a relationship of—of affection,—you know what I mean? A pleasant relationship, eh?"

She smiled encouragement, and he proceeded unctuously: "The more we know of each other, the better shall we be able to understand each other's difficulties and our relative duties. You see I have a sense of duty. I may unfortunately outlive my father. That is a contingency for which a son should be prepared. I have been very little at home, you see, since I was a boy. I know as little about property as property knows about me, and I agree with you. It is high time that I began to learn the duties and responsibilities of the position in which I must sooner or later be placed. I am at home now on leave

for two months, and I hope to make the acquaintance of all my father's tenants while I am here."

"My father will appreciate your motive when you explain it to him," Ella answered easily.

"Does that mean that you do not?" he asked reproachfully.

"It does not come into my province, you see," she answered smiling. "I am not a tenant." She heard footsteps behind her and looked round. "Ah," she exclaimed, "here is my brother Luke. Luke, well come. Captain Pointz will be glad to explain to you his ideas about property and responsibility and the duties of landowners. They will interest you as you have ideas yourself on these subjects. I must go about my trivial woman's work. Good day to you both."

She left the two facing each other, and hurried on. Her sense of humour was not strong, but the situation appealed to her as curiously funny, and she laughed as she pictured the encounter to herself. She had not been taken in by Algernon's impromptu harangue. She judged the son by the mother and knew what to make of his sense of duty. The right of a landlord to wring money from his tenants was the only right he would ever recognise in their relative positions. His admirable sentiments had been thrown away upon her, their object was obvious, and the expression of them struck her as a waste of good hypocrisy.

Nothing in the least funny came of the encounter between Luke and Algernon. The moment they were alone together they were both of one mind: a common impulse moved them to fly from each other. Luke's assurance had a trick of deserting him in the presence of a member of the class in which assurance is innate. It was always after an interview with one of them, and upon reflection, that he "scored off him, I can tell you!" and made his "hits." He was taken aback by the way in which Ella had handed Captain Pointz over to him, and Algernon had given him no time to recover himself. He got in the first word and the last. As he settled his hat on his head after taking it off to Ella with exaggerated deference, he began to speak: "I hear you are exceptionally well-read," he said, in the man-to-man tone which, from one of the "classes" to one of the "masses," usually acts at the moment as

an emollient—with after effects according to constitution and personal idiosyncrasy. "You have the advantage of me in that. 'The Queen's Regulations' is about all that is expected of me in the way of reading. But that kind of thing doesn't satisfy me now. I expect you know what it is. A young fellow goes with the stream for a bit, but after a while, if he's going to do any good, he strikes out for himself. It's what you did, I believe. Now, what I want, if you don't mind the trouble, is to get you to give me a list of good books, modern books, you know, on practical subjects, the land question, and that sort of thing. I'll not detain you now. You're off on business, I expect, and I have an engagement too,"—he stepped away from Luke as he spoke. "But bear it in mind like a good chap." He held out his cigar case to Luke, who took a cigar mechanically. "I shall rely on you." He turned his back, and was off.

Then Luke woke up and swore. He knew exactly what had happened. The hereditary ruler has it in him to rouse the instinct of subserviency in the hereditarily ruled; the fellow had hypnotised him. Luke bit the end off the cigar and spat it out aggressively. That did him good. The act was symbolic. It expressed his opinion of Algernon and got it "off his chest." It would have seemed poor-spirited to Luke to sacrifice an excellent cigar, as some men would have done, because he despised the donor. He felt it enough to mark his disapproval of the man, so he sent that insult by implication after him, and felt that he had set himself free to enjoy a good smoke.

Luke Banks had his moments of being in the right. The trouble was that he made no attempt to discriminate. The power to discriminate comes when the necessity is recognised. Luke wallowed in generalisations, and generalisations wreck our judgment. Because some landowners and their heirs were "as bad as they make 'em," he would have exterminated all landowners on the spot without giving any guarantee either that the land should not lie waste or that those who come into possession of it next should be any improvement upon their predecessors. Not reason but rage was at the bottom of his discontent, the rage of a small ungenerous mind eaten up by envy. His crude notion was that the things which men better

off than himself enjoyed were things to which they had no right, or to which some other objection attached that made it heroic to denounce them. He was always for taking something away from somebody, even the courteous consideration one human being owes to another no matter what their relative positions, never for spreading things out by fair division and making them go round. The things he objected to were all things he had never possessed. He was for wiping the dress-coat off the face of the earth because he had none himself, though that was not the reason he gave. He objected to dress-clothes as a badge of class. He had not thought of them as representing comfort and cleanliness and rest from the labours of the day. He did not appreciate the subtler effects of the change of dress, the way in which the thoughts and cares of the working day are cast aside automatically with the garments with which they are associated, the garments in which the work is done; nor did he perceive the value of the change as a preparation for the full enjoyment of the leisure time by which ease and grace of body are courted to aid in the relaxation of the mind. It did not occur to him that to deprive the world of the function with which the dress-coat is associated would be to level downwards, to deprive mankind of a wholesome habit, a daily discipline very good both for body and mind; nor that the true progressive spirit would prescribe a dress-coat or its equivalent—a change into something fresh at all events—for every man who has earned his ease by a hard day's work. Luke, blinded by prejudice even to his own interests, saw nothing of this, hence he never asked, "Why shouldn't every man have his dress-clothes?" the question that was wanted to put him with real reformers in the right way.

Algernon's excellent cigar filled him with a high sense of his own importance. It made him feel for once like a man who has come into possession of his lawful rights. Before he had finished it he met old Emery Pratt, and, by way of marking his contempt for opulent landowners, he puffed the smoke at him and swaggered by with an insolent stare. Emery had known him from a baby and was prepared to greet him as he would have greeted any other man of his acquaintance, more cordially, if anything, as the son of a man with whom he had always been on excellent terms. That he had been discharged

by Adnam for good and sufficient reason did not weigh with old Emery against this fact, except in so far as he thought it a pity that Luke was not in the right way to do well for himself. But the insolence of that stare was not lost upon him: "Well, well," he said to himself. Ellery Banks, coming up from behind at the moment, had marked the incident, and stopped now to discuss it.

"That's Luke all over," he said. "It 'ud be I'm-as-good-as-you-are-and-a-great-deal-better to his Maker if they happened to meet. He thinks that 'ev'ing no manners makes him the equal of them that knows how to behave. It just shows you what he is. There'd be no more pleasantness in life if levellers of his sort had their way. They're all for levelling downwards. It's amazin' to me that they can't see what to keep and what to let go. The quality 'ev more sense. They see the good of 'in honour preferring one another,' which is another word for polite behaviour to one and all."

"Well, well," said old Emery, aloud this time. "I always think good heart is at the bottom of good manners. The desire to please is wonderfully refining; it'll put a polish on the roughest, and make him forget himself—that's the beginning of wisdom. A man that thinks too much of himself is bound to offend. Let's hope Luke's heart is all right, then his manners will mend. A man without manners is like grit in a pudding; society has no appetite for either of them. It's not much good getting rid of the disgraces of life if you let the graces go too. It's like when you're weeding; if you pull up the flowers with the weeds, you're doing as much harm as good."

CHAPTER XXI

THE slopes of the Castle hill on the western side were thickly wooded, and in a clearing of the wood near the Castle itself stood the cot which the duke, when he came into his kingdom, had bestowed upon Rycote for life, with twelve shillings a week and a rabbit, when rabbits were in season.

The cot must certainly have been the one in which the three little bears used to live. Any child would have recog-

nised it at once, with its high thatched roof, its overhanging eaves, its diamond-paned windows, the little path up to the door, and the creepers which festooned the porch. Here and nowhere else must little Snow-White have come that day when her wicked stepmother turned her out, and the proof of it was the old round table in the middle of the room when you went in at the door, and the steep stairs in the corner up which she climbed to the bedroom above. Only now, Alice and Emily Ryecote were sitting by the door with their lace-pillows on their laps, and Ella Banks was sitting with them, and their mother was laying the table for tea and joining in the conversation as she passed to and fro. The hot sun on the pines all day had brought out the scent, and its fragrance, filling the air, made it a joy to breathe. Ella had explained the object of her visit, and the arrangement she proposed was happily agreed to. The girls were to go to her twice a week for lessons in the difficult branch of their work which was her specialty, and each was elated at the prospect for reasons of her own to which the lace-making was secondary. Red Rose Farm had other attractions for both of them. To Alice, it held out the hope of hearing the discussion of subjects in which her interest had lately been aroused by the talkative Luke. She was of an anxious, emotional nature, sensitive to the sufferings of others and thoughtful, but untaught; just the nature to be influenced by Luke's various assumptions, especially his assumption of knowledge of the world, of the wickedness of rulers and governors, of how all wrongs could be righted and would be when he got a hearing. She believed him capable of any sacrifice for the good of others, and thought Robert inferior in comparison, and unpardonably supine and acquiescent. Emily, to whom Robert was engaged, was of a lighter nature—vain, frivolous, flighty; given to resent any intrusion of other people's troubles upon her notice as likely to spoil her own pleasure in life. To be moved to compassion is to be made to suffer; and it is not uncommon for even kindly people to put on hardness in self-defence, and to refuse to know in order to save themselves from the pain of realising, which would destroy the pleasure of living, and drive them into the ranks of those who labour for others all their days. Red Rose Farm to Emily meant young men about, and flattery and

flirting, and delightful breaks in the monotony of her life at home, which she hated. To her it seemed circumscribed and shut in, as the cot in the clearing was shut in by the tall dark pines that surrounded it. It must have been the attraction of opposites that drew Robert to Emily, that and a pretty face, for no two people could have been more unlike in mind. But it was what usually happens. Good qualities such as Alice's, who in character seemed a born mate for Robert, have no chance against the subtle sensual attraction of a nature like Emily's. Robert, strong, honest, serious, and puritanical himself, could not believe that she would always be feather-headed. He saw nothing but youth and femininity in her flightiness. Her coquetries he mistook for the outcome of girlish modesty, little ebullitions and affectations to cover natural embarrassment. His judgment was also handicapped by the traditions of his class on the subject of feminine failings and peculiarity. Silliness he excused as inevitable; it even had its charm for him as an attribute of girlhood. With Ella before him he was obliged to recognise the possibility of sense, steadiness of purpose, and strength of character in a young woman, but he held it to be exceptional. Like many men he had a latent feeling that these dull qualities were peculiar to the women of his own family, and right in them, but not necessary in a sweetheart; in whom, because she is young, little foibles are to be expected, and whose weaknesses are an added attraction, serving to enhance his own strength, and vouching for his power to protect. A large-hearted man delights to have a woman to protect, and the greater the need of protection the happier he is. To be tolerant makes him feel generous, and when she requires care or exacts attention his heart warms to the work. In all ages the knight feels at his best when he is called upon to serve his lady. The guarantee of her worth to him is his own delight in her beauty. The privileges of love are enhanced in value when they are withheld; vice knows this and consciously withholds them for the purpose; but virtue also withholds them instinctively because modesty is innate in virtue and imposes reticence. The difference is immense, being the difference between good and bad; but no man in love can distinguish it. This was Robert's case. Because Emily Rye-cote stirred his senses pleasantly, he loved her; and because she

was coy he thought her good, and, honouring her, felt wise in his choice.

"Here's father and some one with him," Mrs. Ryecote, who had paused with the tea-pot in her hand to look out of the door, broke in upon the chatter of the girls. "Why, Ella, it's your brother Luke."

Ella saw Alice Ryecote's colour shoot up to her hair suddenly. Emily began to giggle.

"You've come again to keep Robert's place warm for him, I suppose," she called to Luke.

He was about to retort when he saw Ella, and changed his intention. "I'm after my sister to-day," he said. "She stands in need of protection."

"Ah, it is good to have a brother!" Alice sighed wistfully.

"I see an advantage in being able to protect myself," said Ella.

"But what's the need of protection now?" Mrs. Ryecote asked.

"You ask Ella," Luke answered significantly.

They looked to Ella for an explanation.

"I feel no need for protection," she said coldly, "and I know of none."

Luke compressed his lips, and nodded his head up and down. "You didn't have to turn me on to Captain Algeron Appleton Pointz then, I suppose, to get rid of him this afternoon?"

Ella laughed. "What happened?" she said. "Did you have a good time?"

"One of us had," he answered complacently. "I leave you to judge which it was."

Alice's confidence in him beamed up at him out of her trustful eyes.

"But what has Captain Pointz been doing?" Emily wanted to know. "Did he offend Miss Pride with a glance from the other side of the road?"

"That was about what it amounted to," Ella answered. "Captain Pointz said 'Good day' to Miss Pride, and Miss Pride had no use for him, so she passed him on to her brother, and got rid of him."

"I shouldn't want to get rid of him like that," said Emily.

tossing her head. "He's more of a man than most, and the best looking, anyway, in these parts. When he says 'Good day' to me, I'll treat him civilly."

"Then you expect him to say 'good day'?" Ella asked.

"The young men I meet mostly do," she answered, with an eye on Luke.

"No wonder," said Luke, rising to the bait. "It's a good day to any young man that sees you."

Ella became thoughtful. She noticed now that Luke had bestowed unusual care on his dress. His boots were polished, his hat and clothes brushed, his scarlet tie carefully knotted; all the usual signs, in fact, of a rustic wooing. And he and Emily were making eyes at each other—but then Emily made eyes at everybody, and under Robert's very nose too. That meant nothing. Yet could it be Alice that Luke was after? Why not? It would be a good thing—her thought hesitated—well, a good thing for Luke. And as to Alice—here she pulled up and hoped for the best.

Mrs. Ryecote's voice recalled her consciousness to what was passing. "Come, Ella, come to tea. Here's a nice fresh egg for you. It'll do you good after the walk."

"You're lucky to have fresh eggs," said Luke. "You wouldn't if you were still at Pointz. You know what's happened there? No? Why, Mrs. Pointz 'as sent the word round, cottagers aren't to keep no more poultry or pigs."

"You don't say so!" Mrs. Ryecote exclaimed. "That will be 'ard on a many on 'em. W'y, look at ole Auntie wi' 'er bad leg! There's so little she can do, and the bit o' money she made wi' 'er fowls did kinder cheer 'er up. She's that sort. Wot's the reason?"

"Oh, the reason's not far to seek," Luke answered. "It's that agent fellow Clutterbuck. He keeps pigs and poultry himself for sale, but the cottagers mustn't keep 'em at all—d'ye see? Bacon and eggs are the staple food of the cottagers. He must 'ave 'em. But bacon's becomin' dearer every day and eggs scarcer. That don't affect Mrs. Pointz in any way, but it do affect that Clutterbuck and pleasurably. It means a good market fur 'is own poultry and pigs. Mrs. Pointz sees with Clutterbuck's eyes. He's a man after 'er own 'eart, and she rules the roost. The squire's a cipher."

"Let's thank the Lord we're 'ere," said old Ryecote.

"What d'ye mean by 'ere?" Luke demanded, "'ere on the duke's property? The duke's playground! I grant you it's smart, a rare show place. Oh, yes, 'e spends money on it. But w'ere does 'e get the money? I'll tell you. 'E gets it from sweated slums. It's wrung out of starving people penny by penny——"

"The duke doesn't know—he doesn't realise—" Ella was beginning.

Luke silenced her. "That's true," he roared. "He doesn't know. And 'e doesn't want to know. 'E's never been in a slum in 'is life. 'E's got a good idea that slums ud spoil 'is appetite if 'e ever looked into 'em, so 'e leaves 'is dirty work to 'is myrmidons. The money 'e spends 'ere is dirty money, but the dirt doesn't show." He stopped a moment, and then addressed old Ryecote. "And, after all, 'ow much of it do you get? Wot does 'is grace's generous bounty amount to? A rabbit a week! 'E could give you fifty rabbits a week and not miss 'em."

"Ay," the old peasant answered deliberately. "'Is grace could give us fifty rabbits a week an' not feel it. An' wot would 'appen? Should we be the better of 'em?"

"W'y yes, I guess," Luke exclaimed, smiling as at a self-evident fact.

The conclusion was hasty, like most of Luke's conclusions. "No, we shouldn't," old Ryecote contradicted. "Fur why? We'd be sick o' the sight o' rabbits in a week." He leant back in his chair and drew a long puff from his pipe with the satisfaction of a man who has made a good point and is entitled to rest there with credit. "Enough's as good as a feast," he resumed presently. "The duke, 'e knows. An' p'raps 'e's learnt from 'avin' too much 'imself. The Lord 'as many ways o' teachin' the truth, an' 'e uses 'em accordin' to 'is man. This un learns best by not 'avin' enough, that un by 'avin' too much, an' it works out right in the end."

Luke's answer not being ready, Emily had a chance, for which she had been watching, to break in upon the discussion, which did not interest her. There were certain things in the world that did interest her, chief among which was dress for her own adornment, the amount of attention she attracted, and the desirable men from whom she might hope to receive it.

"You're always jibing at the gentry, Luke," she said. "You'd deny them their own good looks if you could."

"You think a lot too much o' their good looks, Emily, my girl," her mother said. "Your own man as is to be's good enough to look at, an' it 'ud be better an' more becomin' if you looked at 'im more, an' give up comparin'—though Robert's as good a lookin' man as any that's about, I say, compare who you will."

"Oh, Robert's Robert," Emily rejoined, as if in acknowledging the fact she was giving him the credit due to him in full; "but you can't compare 'im to a gentleman. Robert's good enough for the likes of me, I dare say, but any lady in the land would take Captain Pointz."

"She'd regret it then," said Ella drily, "or I'm much mistaken in the man."

"Well, of course, 'e isn't a marquis and'll never be a duke," Emily retorted maliciously.

They all looked at Ella. She was startled, but remained impassive, as if she had not heard. She was sitting opposite to the open door, and her eyes followed the flight of a wood pigeon across the clearing. Afterwards she remembered how the colour on its iridescent breast was waked by the light as it passed.

"How lovely it is here among the trees at sunset," she said dreamily. "We have nothing like it for beauty near us."

"Wherever you was, Ella Banks, nobody wi' eyes in their 'eads wouldn't say there wasn't beauty enough about," old Ryecote chuckled.

"Good fur yer, father, an' true," his wife followed on admiringly. "Tho' a bit more colour in your cheeks you might 'ave, Ella, but that's sittin' indoors all day over the lace, I expect."

"There's beauty and beauty," Luke asserted, ogling Emily as he spoke. "Black and white may do for some, but give me bright brown and rose leaves floating on milk. Marble statues looks well in public places, but as a man I'll leave 'em there. Cold comfort's about the best they can give. Let 'em stay on their pedestals. Warm flesh and blood's the ticket for 'earth and 'ome."

"I take you, Luke," said Alice Ryecote, severely. "An' I'd 'ave guessed which of us was your sister if I 'adn't 'a'

known. Brotherly love is said to be blind to perfection itself."

"W'y, you wanted a brother jest now," Luke reminded her.

"Not 'aving one I'm apt to forget wot brothers are like. Though of course they have their uses. There isn't an insect that 'asn't, they say."

"Oh, come now!" Luke expostulated, and turned his attention to Alice, whose little explosion he thought he had provoked by his too open admiration of her sister. He had been neglecting her to her face, which was a mistake. It is a mistake with any woman whom you may eventually find it convenient to have offended. All women are unreasonable, Luke considered, they never can let a man have a bit of fun; but it is safest to remember that, and to take them as they are. Luke perceived in Alice qualities which a wise man might turn to account for his own benefit. He had no wish to turn them to account at present—flirting with Emily was more to his taste—but he might have; so, with his wary eye on future contingencies, he gave his whole attention to Alice now, and had made it up with her before they parted.

When Ella rose to go, he said facetiously: "I suppose I shall have to escort you."

Ella drew herself up. "I don't see the necessity," she objected.

"Well, you needn't be niffy," he rejoined. "If you are marble, you're all the more precious and must be taken good care of."

This affectation of solicitude for her welfare provoked her. Luke's purpose in the pose was evidently to make a good impression on the Ryecotes, but why? Ella suspected mischief.

When they were well out of sight of the cottage Luke dropped the pose, as he might have cast aside a disguise which he had no further need of and appeared in his natural moroseness.

"You seem to be intimate with the Ryecotes," Ella observed.

"Have you any objection?" he snapped. Ella was silent. "It's no business of your's anyway," he added. Ella remained silent. She had never heard of thought transference, but she had noticed that silence often answered her purpose as well as speech could have done. And silence had two other advantages

which she had perceived. It gave no ground of quarrel at the moment, and could not be quoted against her afterwards. The fact that it might be exceedingly irritating had not escaped her, but that did not weigh with her against the advantages of silence, rather the contrary, if anything. As a child, when she was hurt, she had been taught to hit the inanimate thing against which she had hurt herself, taught to retaliate, that is to say. Expediency is the dominant factor in life, the short-sighted expediency of the moment. Every one within ear-shot suffers if a child cries, therefore it is expedient to stop it. The desire to retaliate is innate, an original sin in which mankind openly delights. It is a joy to hit back. Tell the child to slap the naughty table that hurt it, and it will be happy directly. Habits formed in the nursery become second nature. The child discovers eventually that it has been deceived about the naughtiness of the table, but it infers the right to relieve itself by retaliating on occasion. This impression finds practical expression in after life in many a word and silence intended to annoy. It was on this account that Ella held her tongue without scruple, it may even be with some satisfaction, although she knew that her silence was irritating.

Luke waited a moment and then burst out again impatiently. "You think I'm up to no good at the Ryecote's," he exclaimed, answering her thoughts as clearly as if she had expressed them. "That's so like you, Miss Ella, you always suspect me. You think I'm after making mischief between Robert and Emily, I suppose. You flatter me! But I tell you this, I wouldn't take Emily Ryecote a free gift with a fortune to enhance her charms. She's the sort of beauty any man might play with, but only a fool would marry. I don't know, though," he reflected, "but that I should be doing Robert a devilish good turn if I'd cut 'im out. It 'ud be a let off fur 'im that 'e'd come to appreciate sooner or later. Eh? W'y don't you speak?"

"I was thinking," she said.

They were out of the wood now on a narrow winding path which led down to the direct road from Pointz to Castlefield Saye. He was walking in front of her and stopped now to look up at her as she stood on the hill-side above him.

"You never make a friend of me, Ella," he said in an altered voice. "You keep me off as if I wasn't of yer own flesh and blood. You judge me wrong whatever I say or do. Yet I'd be a good friend to you too if you'd let me. You're a beauty, there's no denying it, but you're too much of a beauty to be safe in a 'umble position wi' rich men about thinkin' any girl fair game that isn't one o' their own cussed class. I make my mistakes like other men, but I'm making no mistake about that, an' I tell you this, I'd kill any man that insulted you."

"I'm not a fool either, Luke," she answered gently, softened by the wistful look in his face. "I can take care of myself. You may trust me."

"Pride goes before a fall," he said.

"Yes, but self-respect stands firm on its feet," she answered.

"Well, I'll say no more," he rejoined. "You know now what I think. I'll leave you here." He looked along the road to right and left, and shaped his course for the Brabant Arms.

"Luke," she said, putting her hand in her pocket, "your boots are wearing out. While you're down on your luck—could I lend you a little?"

"No," he said harshly, and walked off.

Ella had misjudged him this time at all events, and her heart contracted with a pang of remorse. She looked after him now and saw disheartenment in his gait, pathos in his shabby figure. His concern for her was genuine and she had suspected him. Yet how was she to know that for once it was not money he wanted? And, after all, she had offered him the money because she was sorry for him. Yes, when she came to think of it, she had been touched by the way he spoke even while she thought that his motive was sordid, and she had offered him the money by way of return for his offer of help. With her knowledge of him, how could she guess that he would ever be hurt by an offer of money? Luke had his moments, it seemed—well, she would remember. It would be a lesson to her. She had learnt that a man may have more in him than he ever shows even to the most intimate acquaintance. It was her first glimpse of the puzzling complexity of human nature, the extraordinary possibilities that may lie concealed in characters which are the most apparently easy to understand.

She was walking towards Pointz now. The road wound out of sight round a corner in front of her. On her left the hill rose abruptly, on her right the ground sloped gently down in a fine curve and up again to the Coastguard's Death. The rocks of the craggy height stood out just then, clearly defined in the light of the setting sun; the grass on them vividly green. Further on to the north the sweep of the bay appeared, the sea and the sandy shore, and the sand dunes behind, fringing the common. Among the dunes black figures like ants could be seen moving eccentrically. "Adnam's men," Ella thought, "amusing themselves." It was Saturday afternoon.

Suddenly her strength seemed to leave her. She sat down on the hill side, wondering at herself, yet it was no wonder, she told herself. It was Saturday, and she was always tired on Saturday. "Saturdayish," she called it. A curious numbness stole over her. She could not think. She did not even want to think. The feeling was pleasurable. She was more than content, more than happy. Something was pulling at her heartstrings that caused her a strange delight. The scene was set for an emotional moment. There was harmony of colour in the sky, simple-seeming as a great thought lucidly expressed, and as superb in its effect—a harmony of black and grey all tinged with flame. Above the sea, against a pale grey background, a great, dark, heavy, mountainous mass of cloud hung suspended; and all about it the colour played, and into its cavernous depths it shot, flame-colour, flashing from the west. It caught the ragged edges of the cloud, it spread, a transparent veil, across its dark caverns; the whole mass was glorified by it, and made more awful. It brought death and hell to mind, and the Day of Judgment. Ella looked at it and thrilled, not frightened—splendidly excited. She was one of the grand women who will stand up fearlessly before heaven and earth and speak for themselves when the Day comes! She watched it, the great dark mass of cloud hanging suspended above the sea that lay crouching below, as if it were flattening itself in dread of the weight that threatened it; watched it break up, a whole continent resolving itself into vast fragments, each of which became a fortified island, roughly embattlemented, with rugged bastions and straggling outworks tinged with flame.

But Ella lost sight of the sunset. Before it faded she

awoke to a strange consciousness of the Castle high above on the hill, behind her. She had only been in it once, yet she knew it; she was at home in every corner of it, from the top of the watch-tower which for centuries had dominated the whole country side, down to the dungeon in the lowest depth, the existence of which was not now known to any man alive. She came to narrow winding passages by steep stone stairs and looked into close dark rooms all enveloped in an atmosphere of secrecy. She passed through state apartments and living rooms and down long corridors and galleries all open to the light of day, all made to invite inspection as if the intention were to disclaim against secrecy, to make it clear that there could be no secret dealing here of any kind. She knew it all so well! She had known it since ever it was raised upon that spot, and, solid as it was, and long as it had stood and might still stand there, she knew it to be but an ephemeral thing compared to herself. For she had always been—been in the past eternity and would be in the eternity to come.

She came back to herself, came back with a stifling sense of dissatisfaction. There was something pulling at her heart-strings. She felt that she must reach out—reach out and draw to herself for solace another soul that was suffering.

Then all at once she was thinking clearly. She had not spoken to Melton since the day she gave Robert her promise to avoid him. She had not even seen him except once or twice in the distance, for she had given up going to church. And what was the use of it all? What was the object? To prevent people talking! And here they were talking all the same. Emily would never have said so much if the thing hadn't been common talk. Emily was too stupid to invent; all she could do was to repeat what she had heard; therefore there must have been talk. Ella writhed—not because there had been talk, but because of the trouble she had given herself for nothing. For it had been a trouble to her, this long fasting and abstinence from the one thing that satisfied her. Melton's presence—his voice. She let herself go for once. This that was pulling at her heartstrings ceased to be vague. She wanted him. And she knew that he yearned for her even as she was yearning for him—tenderly, passionately, all aglow.

“Ella! Ella!”

She had been sitting with her face buried in her hands and had heard nothing. Now she started up.

Melton, on horseback, had come suddenly in sight of her as he turned the corner. He had flung himself from his horse and was beside her with his arm round her; he was raising her face to his to kiss her with that glad cry, "Ella! Ella!" before she could think. It was so natural, so inevitable after the long separation, so boyish and spontaneous, his gladness and the expression of it, that she could only laugh. Her whole being laughed when his lips touched hers—touched hers gently and rested there, very delicately. She had known that it was so that he would kiss.

"Ella, where have you been all this long weary time? Why have you avoided me? Don't you know that I want you? You want me too. I know you do. I know it now. Kiss me again!" She disengaged herself. "Why have you grown cold?" he asked. "You were glad to see me—just as glad as I was to see you."

"You took me unawares," she said—

"Surprised you, and you betrayed yourself, God be thanked! Oh, I am glad! I am glad! Why should you regret it? You need not put up your hand," he broke off. She had made a defensive gesture. "Surely you know that I would not touch even the tip of your finger without your leave. You don't think me the coarse sort of brute that a woman has always to be on her guard against?"

"No, no," she protested. His deadly charm for her lay in his extreme refinement.

They stood a moment so, a little apart, neither speaking, neither looking at the other, then he said impatiently: "Let us sit down. I must speak to you now. Sit here"—he motioned towards the bank. She took her old seat. "May I sit too?" She nodded. He sat down beside her, and they both looked straight before them. Melton was not effeminate. He had the man's way with the woman he loves. Ella felt compelled to listen to him. Besides, they had gone too far. There must be an explanation now; it was better to get it over. He turned to her. "You have not answered my question," he said. One of her slim white hands lay on her lap inertly, the pink palm upwards. He longed to take it, but

he controlled the impulse. "You have not answered my question," he repeated.

"Which of them?" she asked. She looked at him as she spoke, and broke into a smile at the recollection of the torrent of questions he had poured out. The smile encouraged him. He took her hand and played with it, she looking on, as it were, curious about her own sensations. He bent over the beautiful hand and held it to his lips. The touch of his soft moustache upon it was like nothing she had ever felt before—except that first kiss. Her heart began to throb heavily; she felt breathless; but she could think. This was what her whole being had desired awhile ago, her heart's desire, and now that she had it, was she happy? No—because she could think.

He knew better than to speak now, and she knew better than to keep still.

"You asked me why I had avoided you," she said, with difficulty steadying her voice. "I promised my brother Robert——"

"What had Robert against me?" He put her hand down on his knee and grasped it tightly.

"Nothing," she said simply; "nothing against you as a man. On the contrary. But your rank—the difference of position——"

Silence again fell dead between them. Again he held her hand to his lips, again the tender touch of his soft moustache thrilled her with a strange, unexpected, inexplicable sensation.

"I was going to curse my rank," he said at last, "but I can do better than curse it. You've heard of King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid? We are not so high, nor so low, either of us, as King and Beggar Maid——"

"These are not the days of King Cophetua," she objected. "Robert is right. We must not meet again. No good can come of it."

"Ella," he protested earnestly. "Ella, I would marry you——" he stopped to correct himself—"I would ask you to marry me to-morrow but for one thing——"

"My birth?"

"No, my mother. Her early Victorian prejudices on the

subject of birth. My father would see it from my point of view, I feel pretty sure, from something he said the other day——” Melton stumbled here. His father had been desecrating lately in the language of the stockyard on the necessity of getting good new blood by marriage into degenerate old families, and the recollection was reassuring. Melton had it in his mind that new blood was badly wanted in his own family, as indeed it was, the fluid having been much thinned in the course of ages by marriages with cousins, and vitiated by alcohol and other excesses; but that is not the sort of thing a young man in love can discuss with a young girl, though it may be the best reason he has to ground a hope upon that their marriage will be sanctioned. The subject had begun to be dangerous, too, for another reason even then. The modern woman has rebelled against nothing more passionately than the evils which have resulted from her sexual subjection. Of this Ella at that time knew nothing, but she was born a modern, ripe for rebellion, and Melton’s instinct stood him in good stead when it caused him to pull up at that particular point. “I feel pretty sure of my father,” he recommenced, “but my mother’s ideas on the subject of marriage are mixed up inextricably with armorial bearings. Good blood to her means nothing but armorial bearings.”

“Why do you suppose the duke would consent?” she asked after a pause. “Do they not share the same prejudices?”

“Oh, well, you see—my father knows more, of course.”

“More about what?”

“About men and women, you know.”

“I don’t know,” she answered, withdrawing her hand. “And the position remains the same.”

“At present,” he said. “I cannot break my mother’s heart. She has been such a darling mother to us.” His eyes became suffused. “I must consider her——”

“Yes, you must,” Ella answered decidedly. “And you will consider her best by not seeing me again. I will not see you again. No good can come of it.”

He would have argued the point but for a sudden interruption. Some one was hurrying down the road towards them. It proved to be Eustace all out of breath. They jumped up on recognising him.

"Oh—there you are—old chap," he gasped. "Not hurt? Thank God! What a relief!"

"Hurt, no! What should hurt me?" Melton demanded, by no means pleased.

"I was afraid," Eustace got out by degrees, "you'd had—had a toss. Platinum passed me on the road—just now—much agitated—reins hanging—galloping as if he were hag-ridden. Couldn't catch him. Came on here—expecting to find—er—your mutilated remains. Horrid feeling—old chap. What a relief!"

Melton looked about him as if he had lost something. "I—I forgot Platinum," he said.

The words seemed to direct Eustace's attention to Ella, for he looked at her for the first time, and took off his hat. "Miss Ella Banks, is it not?" he said with another look, not of inquiry this time, and not of approval.

Her steady eyes met his. "Platinum was on his way home, I suppose," she said composedly. "If he gets there riderless——"

"Jove, yes!" Eustace took her up. "Come, Ninian, we must—er—leg it—for the stables, or they'll have the whole country—up—looking for you. The little mother—er—frightened to death."

"We needn't trouble ourselves," Melton said sombrely. The colour had risen on his dark face. "Look! Platinum has been caught, I think——"

They looked along the road down which Eustace had come. A mounted man was in sight, riding quickly towards them, leading a second horse. Melton, his senses sharpened by jealousy, had recognised the rider at once and with a pang. It was Adnam Pratt leading Platinum, and his advent, though opportune enough under the circumstances, struck Melton as ill-omened.

Adnam rounded up the two horses in front of the group, and at the same time called to Melton, "You're all right?" and then thanked God in a tone of relief. "I was afraid something had happened to you," he said, "when I met Platinum. He was making a bee-line for the stables. I just had the luck to hook his reins with this as he passed"—Adnam showed the handle of his hunting crop. "I told him he must

come back with me to look for you, and he came like a lamb."

"What luck!" said Eustace. "There would—er—have been such—a—bother at the Castle——"

"If he'd returned alone?" Adnam got in. "So I thought." He was handing Platinum over to Melton and turned to Ella, who was standing beside him, patting his horse's neck.

"Paddy, isn't it?" she said. "Will he carry two?"

"Three of us," Adnam answered. "My father hunts him."

"Take me up, Adnam," she said. "I'm tired." Her voice was weary enough. "I don't want to take you out of your way. You can put me down——"

"Out of the way doesn't matter," Adnam said cordially. "I'd take you to your own door if it were fifty miles out of the way. But how am I to get you up?"

"What is it you're proposing to do?" Eustace asked.

"I'm proposing to take Ella up behind, and give her a lift home—pillion-wise, you know," Adnam answered.

"Safe—eh?" Eustace asked, economising words to save time.

"Safe enough, we've done it before," Adnam replied.

Eustace put his hands in position. "I—er—could give Miss Banks—er—a leg——" He stopped short, pulled up by doubt of the delicacy of the expression from what he supposed would be Ella Banks's genteel point of view. If it had been Lena, he would not have hesitated.

"A leg up," Ella herself said tranquilly, finishing the phrase for him. "I am afraid my shoe is dirty." She put out her foot as she spoke and looked at it; so did he—looked hard, as at something worth looking at.

"A man's hand—er—would not be dirtied—er—by all the dust that could collect on that shoe," he said, his enunciation quickened by admiration.

"You have your gloves on fortunately," she said, as if that settled the question, and accepted his help without more ado. Springing from his hands she was mounted in a moment, neatly, behind Adnam.

"Thank you," she said. "Good-bye. Adnam, I'm ready." Her eyes lingered perceptibly on Melton, then she turned her head and looked forward, resolutely. Her right arm was round Adnam. He dug his heels into the horse's flanks and at the

same time clasped her hand. "Hold on tight, Ella," he warned her, and they were off.

"Well, I'm—*blessed!*" Eustace exclaimed. He stood in the middle of the road looking after them, until they had rounded the corner and were out of sight. "What do you—er—make of that?" He turned to his brother, but he did not press the question. There was answer enough for him in Melton's face.

Melton was standing with his back to his horse and his arm stretched out holding the reins close to the bit. The two together so would have made a fine picture, though not of the school which would have nothing in a picture but form and colour, for in this the suggestion of a story would have been strong. No one could have looked at the expression in the young man's face without asking, "What does it mean?" Even in the horse's eyes there was intelligence, a knowledge of something, a question as he stood, his beautiful head half turned to look—at what? What did he expect to see in those eyes in which was the knowledge of things gone wrong, and the poignant question, "What next?"

Melton had not answered his brother. Eustace turned away, embarrassed. He was not of the prying kind. He did not want to know more of Melton's private affairs than Melton chose to tell him; but this—he did not define it—had already forced itself upon his attention, and caused him some fugitive uneasiness. It might be well to say something; but not now. Just now—if he could only think of something in-different to say, it would be best. It came to him unexpectedly—clattering around the corner, riding right at them, the something that he wanted: "If it isn't—er—a whirlwind," he said, "it's Lena."

It was Lena with her horse on his haunches, her whip whirling round her head, and her impetuous tongue making disturbance enough to alter the most strained relations.

"Do you know what's happened?" she cried. "It's awful. It's a tragedy. The White Witch has carried off Adnam Pratt! I met them. She was holding him tight—*my* Adnam, the only man I ever loved!"

"I thought—er—I——" Eustace was beginning.

"So you are—when Adnam isn't there," she rejoined, and slid from her horse. She rode like a monkey and got,

down like one. It is safe to tell the simple truth when it sounds preposterous; Lena found it amusing also. And this was the simple truth. The man she was with was always "the only man she ever loved."

"I say," she said, quieting down, "what is Ella Banks? She has a meaning—

*"And beauty such as woman never wore
Until it came a kingdom's curse in thee—"*

is that it?"

"She is a—er—very beautiful girl," Eustace said seriously, "and a good one. I hope nothing will happen to spoil her life." He spoke with intention, and Melton knew it.

Lena's groom came lumbering around the corner on a heavy horse. He was a heavy man himself, staid and responsible. The duchess, if she did not know all that Lena was capable of, at least knew enough of her "tricks and her manners" to insist that she should always be accompanied by a trustworthy old servant when she rode. Unfortunately the precaution was of small avail because steadiness makes for weight as often as weight (in another sense) makes for steadiness, and the old groom on a suitable mount could easily be outdistanced by his light charge also suitably mounted as became her weight.

"Eustace," Melton said, leading his horse forward, "ride him home—home for me, will you?"

No need to explain. Eustace always understood, he was such a good chap. Ninian wanted to be alone. Even Lena seemed to understand, for she scrambled up on to her horse again, agile as a monkey, and the two rode off together.

"Hump," said Eustace, by way of explaining his brother.

"Love," Lena insisted.

And they both remembered that they had used the same words once before. On that occasion they were laughing; this time neither of them saw anything to laugh at.

Melton, left alone, sat down, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands—sat there so, on the lone road side, until the stars came out. And no one saw him again that day.

CHAPTER XXII

DURING the summer, only Colonel Kedlock remained stationary at the Castle. The duchess took Lady Ann and Lena to London for the season, the duke was understood to be moving about, looking into things, Eustace had joined his regiment, the flag was hauled down at the Castle, and monotony fell upon the neighbourhood. But Melton still came and went like a restless earth-bound spirit, doomed to appear and disappear and reappear, but for no particular purpose that anybody ever discovered.

Autumn was on the wane before the family party was reunited. The different members dropped in at odd times. Lena returned first to look after her father—so she said; but no one attached any significance to the assertion at the time; then the duchess came with Lady Ann and announced herself bent on having “a nice quiet time”; the duke slipped in without any expressed intention, and Eustace followed on long leave. His particular attraction was his brother Melton, on whose account he was far from easy in his mind.

One Sunday, late in the afternoon, he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out of an open window, though he was not near it, and see-sawing backwards and forwards on heel and toe, the image of an idle man untroubled by thought or care. Yet he was thinking hard. He spoke with difficulty, but his thoughts were always fluent enough and clear.

He was in his own room, which opened on to the terrace in front of the Castle, his “den,” his home, the only corner of the wide world that he felt to be especially his own. It, and the bedroom opening out of it, had been his ever since he left the nursery. It was a large room and representative. Glancing at the collection of heterogeneous things it contained, one would have said that all of the occupant which was not sportsman was dilettante. There were pictures, books, busts, guns, whips and sticks, golf clubs, a buhl cabinet full of china, some deep easy chairs covered with leather, a large writing-table turned sideways to the light, another table with cigar and cigarette boxes on it, and pipes and tobacco; and yet

another with books, papers and magazines. Of a truth a heterogeneous collection, but assorted. Order characterised the whole. It was the room of a man of many tastes to whom disorder of any kind was an offence. It was this characteristic that made it possible for the *Madonna and Child* to look down from the wall on *The Bather* in white marble in the corner, without incongruity.

The family, with the few friends spending the week-end at the Castle, had been to church in full force that morning for the first time since their return, and Eustace, being crowded out of his seat, took refuge, as often happened, in the Rectory pew on the other side of the chancel. Here, with his brother opposite, and in spite of his strong disinclination to watch him, it was impossible for Eustace not to see more than he wished. Whenever he raised his eyes, there was Melton, gazing intently, and always in the same direction. Ella Banks had not been mentioned between them since the day she had ridden away with Adnam Pratt. Eustace had not seen her since, until this morning, when, for a wonder, she was in church, sitting beside her brother Robert. Directly the service was over, Melton hurried out, and Eustace followed him, intending to ask him to come for a walk; but he was nowhere to be seen.

Algernon Pointz, also at home on leave, hailed Eustace: "Are you looking for your brother?" he said. "He's gone down the road after Ella Banks. I mean he's walking in the same direction. No use stalking that beauty. She has brothers who would bristle at the proverbial cat that might look at a king if by chance it glanced at her."

Eustace turned his back on the rancid fellow, and, finding his mother, gave her his arm to help her up the hill.

Now, late in the afternoon, he stood, hands in pockets, balancing himself on heel and toe, apparently looking out of the window, but in reality seeing nothing, his whole mind being intent upon his brother, who was sitting near him in a deep armchair, chin on breast, looking down at the floor moodily. Eustace could see him though his eyes were fixed on the distant prospect.

"Out of sorts, old chap?" he said at last. Melton shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Try—er—a change," Eustace pursued with difficult enunciation. "It is time—er—you had a—change—a—er—thorough change. You have been—er—hanging about here—doing nothing—too long. Thorough change is—er—the thing for you. A fellow is—er—is bound to get hipped if he—er—if he hangs about a place doing nothing—doing nothing—er—you know—too long."

"You're coming it rather strong on idleness, aren't you?" Melton rejoined, looking up at his brother without raising his head.

"Oh—er—I'm on leave—er—you know," Eustace rejoined. Melton's eyes wandered round the room aimlessly.

"You are—er—doing no good here," Eustace resumed, and stopped short.

Melton looked at him again, sharply this time, as if to see if he meant more than he said. Eustace's eyes were again on the distant prospect; his face was impassive.

"There is nothing like change," he asserted once more, dropping each word in his slow way, which had the advantage of giving to each its full weight—"when a man is at a loose end, doing—er—doing no good, don't you know."

"What do you mean by that exactly?" Melton asked. "It's the second time you've said it. To be told that one's doing no good is a polite way of telling a man he's doing harm."

"Oh," said Eustace, turning on him with a genial smile, "you cannot—ever—accuse me of being polite to you—dear old boy! And as to doing harm—I—er—never knew you to do harm—of any kind—in your—er—life, and—er—it is the last thing I should suspect you—even—of meditating."

There are things which people of gentle breeding do not express to each other. There is no need to express them. In such people the machinery of thought transference is more effectually active than in coarser minds; they apprehend at once. Melton perceived all that Eustace was too delicate to express. Eustace knew what kept him here and disapproved. And Eustace was right. He intended no harm, but he was doing no good. He had better be off.

"It is just the time of year—er—for a spin abroad," Eustace went on, looking out afar over land and sea as if the whole Continent were spread out like a map before him. "Paris first

—the Boulevards are in full fig just now—er—the women——”

Melton uttered an exclamation of disgust.

“Quite so, my dear fellow, I agree, you know,” Eustace assured him. “But to look at—er—in full fig. Autumn foliage and autumn costumes, don’t you know; both are good to—er—look at. Details in a picture.”

Melton’s mood changed suddenly. He found himself also looking out afar. Paris troubled him for a moment, but his vision passed on beyond. It passed on to blue lakes and sunny mountain tops, to the bracing freshness of high altitudes, to the view of immensity which dwarfs to nothingness all the chagrin of our trivial lives, and to the silence which silences thought, the peace which imposes peace of mind. A man who is just drifting without will or intention is easily impelled in any direction; a good push or pull relieves him of the trouble and responsibility of deciding for himself, which he hates. Melton had had a push; he was moving.

“It’s boring travelling alone,” he said.

“No need for that,” Eustace rejoined, “that is—er—if I am any good.” He looked at his brother wistfully. “I have two months’ leave as it is, and could, er, get an extension no doubt, but, er—I know I’m a dull chap.”

Melton put the assertion aside with an affectionate glance and a gesture. He rose and stretched himself. “You are the dearest fellow in the world,” he said. “Let’s go—next week.”

“Why not to-morrow?” Eustace wanted to know. “Hanging about here, doing no good, doesn’t—er—suit me either. I should be delighted to be off—to-morrow. When the week-enders go—parents can get on without us.”

“How about Lena?” Melton said, smiling, but without looking at his brother.

“Oh—Lena!” Eustace rejoined, also breaking into a smile. “Lena is a—pickle, Ninian. I do not suppose, er, the convent is built that could contain her, unless, er, they impressed the will of the Lord upon her in the, er, tender way they used to, by, er, walling her up. But, er, there is no harm in her, you know, er—no harm at all.”

“She is not the sort of girl to leave lying about all the same,” Melton said, decidedly. “But I don’t suppose she will be left lying about for long. She’s for marriage and men.”

"For marriage, if you like," said Eustace, bridling; "but pull up at men."

"I beg your pardon, Eustace," Melton hastened to apologise. "I only meant that she likes men."

"It isn't like you to, er, mean more," said Eustace. "You would not—er—have said so much if, er, you had not, er, been all out of sorts."

"I certainly shall not again," Melton answered. "I didn't know that you were serious."

"Oh—as to serious, you know"—with a gesture of deprecation—"but I like the little girl. And there is, er, no harm in her—none at all." He broke off, and then as if that matter had been satisfactorily settled and was done with, he resumed, in his former tone: "We'd better go, er, and see to our traps—give the order to, er, pack, don't you think? Also, er, we must warn our parents."

They left the room together, Eustace standing aside to let his elder brother pass out before him, an act of courtesy not in keeping with his refusal to be accused of ever being polite to Melton (dear old boy). But the habit of his whole life was a contradiction to that disclaimer. He had a grace of manner, a natural courtliness which was too much an expression of himself to fail him with anybody, or under any circumstances.

Next morning the whole party came out on the steps to wish them good-bye and see them drive off—all except Lena. The brothers had kissed their mother and sister and shaken hands with their father and the rest, and were just about to get into the omnibus in which they were to be driven to the station at Closeminster, when some one called, "Eustace! Eustace!"

"Oh, that wild girl!" said the duchess, "where is she?"

Eustace ran back into the hall, up the grand staircase, and round a corner out of sight.

"Well!" Lena exclaimed, flinging her arms round his neck, "isn't it horrid of you to be going at all when your leave is so short, let alone going without even saying good-bye!"

"You said good-bye to me last night," he reminded her.

"That was only good-bye in public. You knew I should want to kiss you." She kissed him as she spoke.

"Now, look here," he admonished her, "you must not—er—get into the habit—make a—habit—of this sort of thing. It is—er—" he had to pause to find the word and filled up the interval with a kiss to save time—"not the right thing, you know. You are too old now——"

"Well, you *are* horrid!" she declared. "If I mayn't kiss you, who may I kiss?"

"Oh—me," he gave in. "If you only kiss me——"

"Then why are you sermonising?"

Melton called from below: "Eustace, we shall miss the train."

He kissed her hurriedly. "Good-bye," he said. "Now, do not forget—only me!"

When he had gone Lena danced the sailor's hornpipe in the corridor all by herself, and wound up at the salute with a shrill "Ahoy!" which she addressed to the suggestion of a man offered by an empty suit of armour on a pedestal, in convenient proximity to which the last step had brought her.

The duke led the duchess to her morning room.

"Good friends, those two boys," he remarked on the way. He liked to think of "those boys" as such good friends; it seemed a credit both to him and to them. "Glad to see it," he pursued. "Their mother's sons, eh?" He patted the little hand resting on his arm.

The duchess's eyes filled with tears ("Your dear father is always so good to me; so very good and kind"). "We shall miss them," she said.

"Yes. Yes. We shall, of course," he jerked out. "But it is better for them, my dear. Young men should move about—see the world, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Yes, I know," she said, sighing, and with a nervous flicker of her little hands. They were in her sitting-room now, and the duke was walking up and down. He made it a rule always to devote a part of every day to the duchess when they were together, and this was the way in which he performed the dutiful attention, walking up and down, racking his brains for something to say. When the ceremony was over and he returned to his own apartment and looked at the clock (a thing he forebore to do while with the duchess for obvious reasons), he was always surprised to see how short a time he had been

away. But he was a kindly man all the same, careful of the little lady and genuinely anxious to make her happy, only, perhaps, rather too easily satisfied that he had succeeded to a permanent extent, because she was smiling when he left her. A secret saying of the Brabants, informally handed down from father to son for generations, was: "Deal well with women." On their scutcheon the motto was "Courage and Purity," but "Deal well with Women" was the one they carried in their hearts, and, being there, it was bound to affect their attitude towards women. The wording is ambiguous enough to admit of more than one interpretation. They usually took it in two senses, their practice being to make love indiscriminately and to pay liberally whenever payment was acceptable, either for value received, or by way of compensation for harm done.

In surrounding the duchess with all the appurtenances of her rank, in making her a liberal allowance of money, in treating her with ceremonious courtesy in public and polite consideration in private, the duke felt that he was dealing well with the woman. He regarded her as a true reflection of all that Providence has intended a wife to reflect of her husband, his opinion generally, that is to say, of what a wife should think and be. For this he was thoroughly satisfied with himself, and he never suspected that she was anything but thoroughly satisfied too. Like everybody else he mistook her incessant acknowledgment of his kindness and goodness for a sign of satisfaction. In reality it was the outcome of a dutiful attempt to be satisfied, to quell, by keeping before her always all that she had to thank him for, the secret yearning of her woman's heart for the one great need of her nature which was never satisfied, the need of sympathetic companionship, of confidence, of being understood instead of taken for granted as a good specimen of man's success in the cultivation of a purely artificial product. Woman when moulded by man is too often a creature dwarfed, so far as the higher possibilities of her manifold nature are concerned, like one of those trees retarded in its growth by the patient artifices of a Japanese gardener. The result, a forest tree in a flower-pot, is wonderful—but of what use?

"The boys" were inevitably uppermost in the duchess's mind at this moment, and the duke pursued the subject to

humour her, although his own mind was running on something else. "Yes, yes," he said, making the most of each word by the way he pronounced it, so as to have words enough to carry him on, with a decent interval, to what he wanted to say. "I am a lucky man." He felt the rudimentary whisker on his cheek carefully as if to make sure that it was still in its place. "'The king is happy in child and wife'—eh?"

"Oh, my dearest," the duchess exclaimed, putting up her hand, "don't, *don't* say that!"

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

"Don't you know how it goes on?" she said. "It is dreadful. Everything has been dreadful lately—so ominous!"

"But how does it go on?" the duke asked, pondering, the satisfaction of his own curiosity weighing with him as a matter of course rather than her wish to hear no more. "Let me see—'The king is happy in child and wife'—ah, now I have it," he burst out: "'Take you his nearest, take you his dearest, give us a life!'"

The duchess uttered an exclamation. "Didn't I warn you?" she cried. "Oh, I wish you had not said it!"

"But, my dear, why not? What is there in it?"

"Oh, dearest, don't you see? *Give us a life.*"

"I only see that you are a nervous, silly, little woman," he answered playfully. "You must give up this sort of thing, you know. It isn't good for you—having presentiments, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"But they so often come true," she lamented; "presentiments, when they strike me like that." She clasped her hands over her heart as if she were suffering there from a blow.

"But what's the good?" he argued. "You give yourself two shocks instead of one."

"I know," she said. "But you don't understand. I never *give* myself. It is given to me. I don't want a warning which is no warning, because I can't do anything to prevent it——" She was pulled up by this tangle and had to stop to extricate herself.

This gave the duke a chance. "Let me see," he pondered. "What is the story? Ah! I have it. Tragedy of the dark ages, you know. What parallel can there be in our day? We don't sacrifice a beloved son or a still more beloved wife to

stop the plague. We equip an ambulance and send out a medical man. Common sense that, you know. Put the past into poetry if you like, but give us the prose of good sound common sense while we're alive. Besides," he broke off, catching a glimpse of an even better reasonment, "there are more ways than one of giving a life, you know. You can devote it—devote it to something or somebody. Why, as a wife, didn't you yourself give your life—devote it—to me?"

She smiled and nodded. That at all events was clear to her.

The subject might now be changed with advantage. He took a turn up and down the room, and came to the point which he had in his mind.

"By the way," he said, "what are you doing with that new piece of lace, the wonderful bit, you know, that clever girl—er—at Pointz made?"

"I have not done anything with it as yet," she answered.

"Wonderful work," he observed. "The Queen herself has nothing more beautiful. You must buy up all you can get—bespeak it."

"You don't know that girl," said the duchess, in the tone of one with a grievance. "I tried to arrange with her through Ursula Pratt to give me the first refusal of all she made, and, will you believe it? She just laughed and said: 'Is it likely?'"

"Didn't you say something," he began, as if with difficulty remembering, "about her and Adnam Pratt?"

"Probably," she answered. "It really would be most suitable—such a handsome pair." She became animated. Match-making in any class excited her interest. "But Ursula herself is rather queer about it."

"She disapproves?"

"No, not that exactly. She doesn't seem to think it likely."

"Are they attached to each other?"

"They see each other constantly," the duchess replied, as if that settled the matter. She knew something of the uses of propinquity.

"Let me see, Adnam is——?"

"Getting on for twenty-two, and Ella Banks for twenty."

"Ah. Suitable ages relatively. Very young though." The duke reflected. "I was going to say," he began by way of

stopping the duchess, who was also going to say. "I was going to say," he looked about him for inspiration—"how lovely your flowers are this morning!"

"Are they not!" she exclaimed, instantly diverted by the pleasure of seeing him pleased.

He bent over a great bowl of roses to inhale the perfume. "Delicious!" he exclaimed. "If life were only all roses! Well!" He expressed with a sigh his recognition of the fact that life is not all roses and cannot be. "But I must not waste precious working time among the roses—dainty things like yourself, my dear. In your company a man is apt to forget that duty should come before pleasure."

This pretty sugar-plum won from her the smile he expected, and he left her on the assurance it gave him of the success of his diurnal effort to promote her happiness.

But the smile went out as the door shut, and all that had been said went with it, except one impression. The little duchess sat long alone that morning, forgetful even of Lady Ann and the Scripture lesson, which they expected to be such a help to them both. She sat, clasping and unclasping her hands. She made piteous little gestures of entreaty towards unseen, obdurate Powers.

"Give us a life!"

The words haunted her. Her heart was full of foreboding.

"Let it be me," she prayed. "Not—O Lord!—not one of my boys."

Then she paused to wonder why she should be afraid for one of them rather than for her husband or her daughter, equally beloved; but she was. Of herself she never thought; and if she had she would not have been afraid. For the little Duchess of Castlefield Saye was incapable of fear for herself. She had the high courage of the thoroughbred. Cowardice is not in the breed. She disliked death, but she had no fear of it, and had she been obliged to face it, she would have concealed her dislike, as she was wont to conceal dislike on many occasions in her life which called for concealment, under the guise of indifference or even of a complacent smile. But threaten one of her dearest, and then the spirit within her would cower; but only from the threat. Give her the danger to face, and she would have up and faced it—recklessly.

Good material wasted, most of that breed, forest trees in a flower-pot.

The duchess had had no education in any true sense of the word, nothing to teach her coherence, to develop her mind so that she could think for herself. On the contrary, her whole training had apparently been directed with the intention of putting a curb upon her intelligence. In the schoolroom knowledge had been dealt out to her in scraps that bore no relation to one another. History to her was the record of deeds done by distinguished people, some good, some bad, and generally unrelated. These deeds, as she comprehended them, stood up alone like solitary pillars in wide waste places; anything that had led up to them or anything that had resulted from them she was not expected to know. The words "cause and effect" in combination were not mentioned to her in any of her "lessons."

Social intercourse is a powerful developer of the mind, but only when you come to it as a trained observer and with the habit of clear thought already established. The duchess had had plenty of social intercourse. She had met everybody of her day who was anybody, but the women she only regarded as appendages to men, a negligible quantity—except when they touched on any subject from a point of view other than man's, and then they were either "not quite nice" or altogether objectionable; unsexed, and to be avoided, anyway. From the men she got nothing since they invariably talked down to her as "only a woman," while at the same time flattering her and fawning on her, these for her beauty, those because she was a duchess. There were women of character in her set, unamiable, masterful women, who compelled society to do for them all that they wanted; they controlled it, ordered it about, made a lackey of it, but not for the purpose of extracting the essence of its intellectuality. Their motives were personal and sordid, motives of gain; their object was to rule and dominate for their own glorification only. Of society as homogeneous, a great body which would be healthy if each individual member of it worked for the benefit of the whole, they had no more conception than she had; their natural cleverness was foiled in its effect by their habit of considering the interests of their own section of the community only. For that they laboured

with a will, and it was as if they had laboured to strengthen one limb until they brought to it an excessive supply of blood from other parts of the body, a plethora dangerous to the limb itself, and a source of disease generally by causing depletion in the other unconsidered members. If they thought of themselves at all as "parts of one stupendous whole," it was with the reservation that they were the only part that mattered and merited attention.

The duchess was not masterful at all, but there was good material in her, as was proved by what she had done to develop the only side of her that had had a chance. The one source of strength in her character was the depth of her affections and her unswerving loyalty. Her only guide and teacher was her intuition. So far as she had had a chance she had shown capacity; she had held her own amid many difficulties. But it had suited those in authority over her to lead her, they had blindfolded her of set purpose, and in that condition she had for the most part to allow herself to be led. She was obliged to feel her way about in some respects, but she never dared to raise the bandage, she was afraid to think for herself. Even when age and experience had relaxed the bandage, she kept her eyes shut, and so never saw that there was any right in the world but the right that man proclaimed. When women began to clamour for the right to be respected, she stood up for protection. "Dreadful women," she said, "what do they want? Men always protect good women." Her eyes must have been very tight shut when that notion was imposed upon her!—In view of great poverty and distress, she obstinately maintained that people brought it upon themselves by their wickedness, and deserved no pity. The remedy was to be good and they would prosper, for is it not written: "*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" This she quoted to Lena Kedlock one day, and was much shocked when that young lady remarked: "Well, the Psalmist must have been a singularly unobservant person, or else things are sadly changed in that respect since his time."

The duchess, full of foreboding, sat now with her eyes shut, both literally and metaphorically speaking, and prayed, when, if only she had opened her eyes and used them to collect in-

formation, as her Maker clearly intended that she should, she could have saved the situation. The Lord helps those who help themselves.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE room in which the duke spent most of his time was fitted up as a library and known as his pre-eminently. When he retired to it that morning he looked at the clock as usual and accused it of having stopped, also as usual, but the clock loudly defended itself by striking the hour emphatically, as if it were indignant. The day was young yet. The duke moved restlessly about the room—a large room, pervaded for him now with a dismal sense of emptiness. He was lonely. He did not tell himself so, nor could he have told anybody else. He suffered from the malady without diagnosing it. But he felt that he must do something to relieve himself—go out, but where? There was one thing which he had many a time during the last few months thought of doing, and had wanted to do, but the impulse to act had never yet come with the thought. It came upon him now, however, urgently. The thing we would do but have no definite intention of doing is apt to accomplish itself in this way—"on impulse," as we say, if we see only haphazard in the universe. "At the appointed time," if we believe in predestination.

The duke unlocked a drawer, took out a pocket-book, examined the contents, and, apparently finding that it contained what he expected and wanted, put it into the breast pocket of his coat. As he was locking the drawer again, Colonel Kedlock came into the room with some papers in his hand. The loneliness with which the duke was afflicted was of the kind that is only intensified by the company of the wrong person, and Colonel Kedlock was the wrong person for the duke just then.

"I have some papers here——" Colonel Kedlock was beginning.

"Don't bother me with them just now," the duke cut him short. "I am busy. I am going to look into—going out."

Colonel Kedlock retired.

The duke waited a little. He thought he heard the tap-tap of his wife's high heels on the parquet of the corridor, and had a panic. That tap-tap was always the signal for a panic. Fortunately the duchess had a habit of walking on the parquet which bordered the thick soft pathway of carpet down the centre of the corridor, which would have rendered her tread inaudible, so that she generally gave timely warning of her approach. The duke hopped (an inelegant word but exactly descriptive of the inelegant action) through the door of the inner room, and shut himself in. Here he was safe from intrusion—not that the poor little lady would ever have intruded upon him at any time or in any place if only she could have been made to understand that he wished to be alone, which she never could, however, so firmly had he persuaded her that her wishes must be his wishes always, her presence always a pleasure and convenient. For this insincerity he suffered the kind of retribution people bring upon themselves by risking future contingencies in order to be agreeable on some present occasion.

This inner room was the only one in which the duke was safe. It was his *sanctum sanctorum*, which the duchess understood that he used for purposes of religious meditation, study, and private prayer. How she came by this understanding she did not know herself, for “your dear father is always reticent about such things”; but the duke knew that this was her impression and left it so. And so scrupulously did she respect his privacy in that inner room, so seldom had she even accidentally looked in when the door happened to be open, that she could not have described either the shape or the contents.

The duke waited a little, then peeped into the outer apartment, where he had left his hat. There was no one there. His imagination had played him a trick. Realising this, and oblivious of his own wisdom of awhile ago on the subject of portents, he took it for a warning to be off if he would escape unhindered. An unobtrusive little door in a corner of the inner room opened on to a narrow winding stone stairway built in the thickness of the wall, and leading into the grounds. The stairway was closed at the bottom by a small heavy door made of wood and iron, and evidently of great age. This door was much battered and weather stained, like a door long neg-

lected and forgotten, and a thick shrubbery, which grew right up to it, helped further to make it appear as if it were never opened; but the noiseless ease with which the key turned in the lock, and the door itself revolved on its hinges, told another story.

When the duke descended that morning, he had to push back the laurels which grew up against the door in order to make room for himself to go out and to shut it. In pushing back the bushes they separated and disclosed a narrow path, a mere track, through the plantation. Following this, and taking as much care to conceal himself as if he were a fugitive from justice and his people were the police, hot-foot upon his trail, he got safely away alone. Had they been after him he might easily have been traced by his dress. In this respect his peculiar taste made him always a conspicuous person. Various stories were told of the effect of the remarkable clothes in which he was wont to appear. On one occasion, finding himself stranded in a remote part of London without a card or a penny in his pocket to pay for his cab, he told the cabman who he was and requested him to call at his house at a time when he himself would be in to see that he was well paid for his trouble. The cabman eyed him intently. "You don't believe me?" said the duke. "Oh," said the cabman, "I'd believe anything of a man who's been let out alone in that suit." On another occasion a strictly Protestant gentleman, meeting the duke in London in his country garb, crossed himself, it was said, on the off chance of its doing some good.

This morning the duke wore trousers of a large pattern of shepherd's plaid, a green washing waistcoat, a brown morning coat, brown boots and white spats, and, to crown all, a white straw sailor hat much too narrow in the brim for the size of his face. And went his way nevertheless without misgiving. The sunshine and the sea-air were exhilarating, and he stepped out briskly, carrying his fifty-eight years as lightly as his young sons carried their early twenties. It was a long walk he had set out upon, even by the short cuts he took across the fields, his own and his neighbour's, and his thoughts had time to range far and wide before he reached his destination. But he did not think exactly, though he could when he set himself to the task. He preferred to visualise, to picture peo-

ple to himself and contemplate their actions passively. In this way society, set in suitable scenery, unrolled itself before him, like a panorama, without troubling him. His was the attitude of the looker-on, desirous of seeing as much as he can but with no sense of responsibility, no wish to interfere or to alter anything that comes within range of his vision, because he does not believe that it is possible to alter anything to an appreciable extent in the established order of good and evil. By preference the duke would have had society stationary, and he liked to picture it so; but when he thought about it he could not see it stationary; therefore, in his hours of ease, his habit was to suspend thought and to visualise. In this state he saw society as a solid body, subject like the earth to changes on the surface—changes of fashion analogous to changes of weather; present discontents, inconsiderately clamouring for redress, answering to storms of varying force and effect, some serving happily to clear the air, some unfortunately destructive in their own area. The solid body of society, as he saw it, had an appointed course to run, just as the solid body of earth had an appointed course to run, everlastingly; and there was no more chance of the one being deflected from its course than of the other. Society revolved on its axis, as the earth revolved, without displacing its great characteristic constituent mountain ranges, its arid deserts, its low lying plains, its changeful yet changeless seas. He saw himself as one of the great constituents of society, immovable. There was a certain regularity, too, in the irregularities that disturb the surface. Untoward events, cataclysmic, awful, were to be expected. You found them in history as far back as you could go. Were there not the Flood and the Plagues of Egypt? The destruction of Pharaoh's Host, now—that must have cost pretty considerable inconvenience to the Government; and so must the fall of the Walls of Jericho; yet what great difference resulted? Society went on in much the same way. Potiphar's wife was contemporary with a great political crisis. Doubtless she always was, as she always is, and, reasoning by induction, always must be, contemporary with great political crises—she and the rest of them (the husseys). There was Cleopatra, too, and Helen, and—and always a woman whatever was toward; always love that is, he observed, and always

most interesting when illicit. It is the great illicit loves that survive for the most part in the memory of the human race; and that was significant, he reflected; but for the exact significance he did not search, therefore he did not come upon the light thrown by the fact on human nature. He glanced in passing at Penelope and her kind, but missed from their attitude the *sauce piquante* which his appetite required. What he arrived at with pleasure by way of the illicit, was the fact that in all the affairs of life, that among all the complicated strands woven into the whole great fabric of events, one golden thread shone conspicuously always. Love, he called it, with passion in his mind implicit. The motive power of love, its vital principle, is passion; so he would have said, and stopped there. To go further would have involved him in the consideration of the difference, which is the difference between Love and Lust. Of the two, in all the affairs of life, love is not the more conspicuous; man, the unfortunate, is hag-ridden by a hundred Lusts, but has scarcely a Love to save him. This the duke did not choose to see. The garb of Truth upon which he insisted in these matters was the garb—or disguise—of refinement. For Truth to be decoratively garmented was indispensable to his comfort. Therefore, when Truth threatened to appear as Lust, he hurriedly covered the gross indiscretion with the beautiful mantle of Love.

He was crossing the fields and had come to a stile at which he stopped to survey the prospect. Looking back he saw a pretty girl tripping towards him. She had her hat in her hand. Her hair, rich brown hair, was bound round with a blue ribbon. Recognising the duke she curtsied low, with a charming blush. The duke paid his devoir to beauty by gallantly helping her over the stile. They walked on together.

"Ryecote, eh?" he said. He prided himself on knowing every man, woman, and child on the estate.

"Yes, your grace, Emily," she answered.

"Ah, I was not sure which. You have grown up since I saw you last—got into long dresses, put up your hair, and all that sort of thing. It makes a great change, but not for the worst, you know, eh? How are your people? Well, I hope."

"All quite well, your grace, thank you."

"That's right. And what are you doing yourself?"

"I'm at the lace-making, your grace, thank you. Ella Banks is teaching us. She knows most hereabouts. It's wonderful what she can do."

"Ella Banks——" His flow of language dried up at the name. They walked on in silence for a little; then he asked indifferently: "Going there now?"

"No—yes—no, your grace," she stammered.

"No—yes—no, my grace!" he said smiling. "Which is it?"

"No, your grace."

He noticed that the girl was uneasy and embarrassed, and had set it down to his grace, when he saw her change countenance and turn pale. There was a man approaching. The man proved to be Algernon Pointz—loitering until he saw them; then he quickened his pace, saluted the duke, and passed on without attempting to stop—also without a glance at the pretty girl.

"Humph," thought the duke to himself.

A path branched off here from the one upon which they were walking. The girl's colour was very high now, and she was evidently in a flutter. "This is my way, your grace," she gasped.

"That your way, is it?" said the duke pleasantly, looking along the path. "Good day to you. Tell your people I asked after them, you know."

"Good day to your grace, and thank you kindly," she replied with a hurried curtsy, and sped away—down a path which ended in a cattle pond and a cow-shed, as the duke knew. "Humph," he commented.

But he did not look round. The etiquette is rigid for gentlemen in these matters. He was annoyed though, curiously annoyed—considering; and he thought that it was a bad sign, a sign that his health was declining. It is said that everybody loves a lover. It was borne in upon the duke now that there are lovers whom nobody can love, and that "affairs of the heart" are not always beautiful to look at. When this was the case, he reflected, the thing to do was not to look at them, especially when they were no business of his. This decision landed him back at his starting-point, "as it was in

the beginning, is now and ever shall be," and there is no help for it.

The beginning of wisdom in social matters is to recognise that change is the one thing inevitable, and that the finest thing for a man to do is to watch for the changes that are pending and see to it carefully that they shall be changes for the better. If all parties were agreed upon this, and would bury their own little axes, which they are usually too fully occupied in grinding to have leisure to use for the general good, what a different world it would be!—supposing it possible that any sufficient number of them could agree upon what changes would be for the better. Perhaps an honest and disinterested desire to find out would enlighten them. The duke would have had the desire had he recognised the radical possibility, but he did not; hence the beginning of wisdom in social matters was beyond him. To mitigate the consequences of evils which he believed to be inevitable was the best that he could do. He gave his mind to reparation; never to prevention. Errors which he had committed himself he allowed to be errors, but condoned as the outcome of desires inherent in the nature of man. Inconsistent, and suffering from confusion of mind, like other men, he labelled as wrong certain acts while at the same time seeing it no harm to commit them, his excuse being that nature would have it so, and custom made no protest. So long as a man among men holds to his precepts, they will look leniently upon his practices—provided their own interests do not suffer. Let him but clamour loudly enough against the women, and his set will not blame him for that he has sinned himself. So it was, so it is, and so it always will be, the duke argued; and no one had ever contradicted him to his face with "not necessarily." That was one of the drawbacks to being a duke. The victim of a vicious tradition himself (for he had a good side to him, the side that had been least cultivated), and seeing no help for it because of the deep-rooted dread of change implanted in him, as in all conservative people; that dread which is the outcome of their inability to see that any change can be a change for the better—he in his turn fostered the tradition. Any principle that the Brabants had been taught as part of the equipment of a gentleman they turned to practical account. If

they did not often know what was best to be done the fault was in the teaching. Any one of them would have died for his country in the same cheerful, nay, unassuming, way that he did everything else; that was in their code. To die heroically is to be a man and a gentleman. And to die for your country is a fine thing, but surely it is much finer to live for it! Dying is such a waste of good material. Also it is much easier than living, being so much sooner over. The Brabants had never intentionally lived for their country; never thought of doing so, or they must have thought of many other things which they had overlooked, such as the diseases of society which threaten its existence and must in the end prove fatal if they are not taken in hand for medical treatment and cured. There is no ignoring the existence of these diseases, but the Brabant breed, considering them as incurable as they are ugly, contents itself with applying palliatives; they insist that to salve the sores over and to cover them up is the only thing to be done. They won't listen to those doctor fellows. Who are they, after all? Not of the Brabant breed, you may be sure, and certainly not in Society. Nobody knows them, and as to their prescriptions—why, obviously, all they want is to bring themselves into notice by upsetting the established order of evil with doses, the only effect of which is to rouse the dormant disease from a passive to an active state.

The duke walked on with his head in the air, seeing, but not foreseeing. Algernon Pointz appeared in the picture unpleasantly and was shot aside to make room for the duke's own boys. He saw their sleek dark heads, their slender elegant figures, their easy graceful movements—all their charm. "Nice fellows," he said to himself, most truly—none nicer.

And that was all that the duke knew about them, all that he asked. He could trust them whatever they did, right or wrong, to be true to their code of honour, to do it like gentlemen. It was a pity that the code did not exact of him that he should know much more of his sons. They were an affectionate family, the Brabants. They stood by each other loyally. These young men were devoted to their father. Taught by their mother, they had the highest respect for him. He might have made anything of them, and he made nothing. He never thought of trying. He just let them be made, as he himself

had been made, by the usual influences, family, educational and social, by which it is customary for the youth of their class to be formed. He had never made companions of his boys, never talked to them intimately, never invited their confidence; hence, with all their affection for him, he was the last person whom they would have consulted or to whom they would have gone for advice in any difficult, delicate matter. "Nice fellows," he summed them up, and that was all he required them to be. What else they were and what else they might have been he never considered; nor did he consider what, as representatives of the class of which he was accustomed to think as the Governing Class, they portended.

The easy affluent duke pursued his way untroubled by the state of society in any class, serene in his conviction that "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end," was the part of his prayer-book that he could rely upon implicitly to mean only what he preferred it to mean and not to break faith with him. He came out of the fields on to a path raised above the high road, which disappeared round a corner so sharply that it apparently ended in a *cul-de-sac*. The ambiguous secret motto of the Brabants, "Deal well with women," was in his mind, and encouraged him. He felt uplifted by the consciousness that he had the will and the power to act upon it. His gladness was that of the man whose pleasures are sanctioned by the only authority he respects, and redound to his credit. He enjoyed the walk; it had invigorated him. With his preposterous hat in his hand, he swung along jauntily. He thought of himself as a man in the prime of life. When he thought of himself so, he forgot that he was a duke, and that made him feel a free man and more vigorous still, and rested and refreshed him. He had arrived at his destination now and put on his hat.

His destination was Red Rose Farm.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE fine bright morning saw Ella at her window working hard. She did not sing like other girls at work; her mind was too active; besides, her work required the closest attention, and concentration meant speed.

The latch of the gate clicked, and there was a sound of approaching footsteps. Ella looked up and encountered the eyes of the Duke of Castlefield Saye. She rose involuntarily, startled, and uncertain what to do; but only for a moment. The duke was coming up the pathway to the farm, and the thing to do was obviously to open the door for him. Ella opened the door before he had time to knock. She curtseyed.

"Good morning, good morning," he said. "I—er. I came to see. Lace, you know. Your lace."

"Will your grace come in?" Ella asked. She took it for granted that he would, and, turning, preceded him along the passage. It was a solecism, and the duke observed it, and thought how much she looked like one born to the right of precedence. He observed much else besides, and kept up a silent commentary upon what he observed with significant nods behind her back. But he was not displeased. On the contrary, his comments, had he uttered them, would have expressed nothing but approval. He noticed with approval the composure of her manner, the grace of her every movement, the pretty unaffected way in which she offered him a chair. She might have been in the habit of entertaining in a palace all her life, so unembarrassed was she to all appearance, so utterly unaware of him as anything but a guest. It pleased the duke to be treated in that way by a beautiful woman; it made him feel human.

He sat down. She remained standing. And there was a pause, during which he gazed at her, but not offensively; rather as an artist painting a portrait looks at his model, gravely and with respect; and, in the same spirit, she bore his scrutiny, as of necessity, but disliking it, because it made her disagreeably self-conscious.

"Yes," he said at last. "Yes. Ah, well!" He sighed.

Ella wondered what was the matter with him—what was coming. She began to feel restive, but she did not show it. Her lace-pillow caught the duke's eye, and recalled his wandering thoughts.

"Your lace," he said. "My daughter——" He stopped short, as if the two words had pulled him up, and seemed to have forgotten what he was going to say. "Lady Ann," he recommenced with an effort—"my daughter, Lady Ann. Her birthday is some time soon. I should like to make her a present of some lace. Have you any of the kind you sold to the duchess?"

"None ready," she answered. "I am doing some now."

She opened out the piece she had on her pillow, and brought it to him. He put on his gold-rimmed pince-nez, and examined it attentively. He was a connoisseur, but it passed his inspection.

"Very beautiful," he said. "A fairy fabric. But your eyes? Such fine work must be very trying for the eyes!"

"It is," she said.

"Mustn't injure your eyes, you know," he pursued, peering into those liquid orbs as an oculist might have peered to examine them. "Must take care of them. Mustn't strain them, you know," he added, shaking his head. "Are you careful? What do you do?"

"I am careful," she answered. "I only work in a good light—with the light on my work, not on my eyes; and I leave off directly I feel the strain."

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "Very right and wise." Then he looked at the lattice window, which was wide open. "But that glass now, those diamond panes, when you have to work with the window shut?"

"It is bad glass," she said. "I have to work with the window open as much as possible. Fortunately it is possible nearly all the year round. I can bear the cold so long as there is feeling in my fingers."

"The glass must be changed," said the duke. "I will——" He was going to say he would have it done at once, but remembered in time that he was not on his own estate. The duke was always so ready to remedy and make good, it was a

pity so few defects came under his notice. "Now about this lace?" he slid off.

"When must it be ready?" Ella asked. "With the utmost diligence I can only make an inch of it a day."

"Lady Ann's birthday," the duke began, then looked about him as if in search of the date, but finding no clue he gave it up. "Oh, well," he said, "you need not hurry. If it is not ready on the exact day, you know, it will do for another occasion—Christmas, for instance."

"I could have it ready for Christmas," Ella answered.

"Barring accidents, I suppose," said the duke.

"Barring illness and accidents," she replied.

"Well," he said, "I will take it if I may." He fumbled in his breast pocket, and brought out his pocket-book. "If you will allow me," he went on, "I should like to pay in advance."

"Your grace is very considerate," she replied; "but I cannot take the money in advance."

"Why?" he asked sharply.

"For fear of illness and accidents," she answered. "I enjoy my work now—the doing of it. I am untroubled about it. But care would come in if I accepted your grace's offer. It would make me feel burdened with debt, and that is a burden which ages and cripples. I know. I have seen it. No, if your grace will excuse me, I cannot take payment in advance."

The duke had made his silent commentary of nods as Ella went on, like a stage manager listening to the rehearsal of a speech. He seemed to like her rendering.

"I ought to have put it differently," he said, obviously thinking aloud. Becoming conscious of this lapse, he stopped, and put his hand up to his head, intending to smooth his hair. The intention was frustrated by his ridiculous sailor hat. Innately courteous, and especially punctilious when he entered the houses of any of his tenants, and with women of every degree, he was concerned to find that he had absently kept it on. From the time that Ella herself had unexpectedly opened the door, he had thought of nothing but Ella. He took his hat off now, and laid it on the table beside him.

"It was not the price of the lace that I meant to offer you," he said, "but a retaining fee. You know what that is? It is customary, and a very fair arrangement. I pay the fee

to secure priority of claim on this piece of lace. If the lace is never done, I lose my fee. It is a sporting chance, you see. But the lace is much more likely to be finished if you have money to live upon while you are making it. Without a retaining fee you will have been working for many months without money to live upon, don't you see?"

The duke took four banknotes out of his pocket-book as he spoke, and offered them to Ella. She saw that they were twenty-five pound notes, and drew back.

"This piece of lace will not be worth a hundred pounds," she said. "It will be much smaller than the piece the duchess bought."

"The piece the duchess bought was a wonderful bargain—for the duchess," he said. "But you must be business-like. You must begin at once to make bargains for yourself. I beg you to oblige me by taking these notes as a retaining fee."

Ella's mind had been busy while he spoke. She remembered her promise "to make them pay." Certain grievances against "them" recurred to her. Witnessing in her father's case the incessant struggles of the small farmer without capital, isolated in his efforts among many others equally isolated because the word co-operation was merely a word to them—for although they might have agreed with you that "union is strength," the idea of combining to help each other had not as yet occurred to them—Ella blamed the landlords for not doing for their tenants what their tenants should have been doing for themselves, and she held it right that "they" should be made to pay. She had saved her own honesty with regard to the value of the lace; that was all she cared to consider. The duke evidently wished to be pillaged, and therefore it was not such a pleasure to pillage him as it would have been to pillage the duchess; but let him have his wish!

Ella took the notes, and the duke returned the pocket-book to his pocket, evidently well pleased. He had seen her hesitation and was relieved when she gave in.

He fingered his hat as it lay on the table beside him, as if he were preparing to go; but he made no move.

"You will not always be making lace," he remarked conversationally.

"No," she answered thoughtfully, looking at the notes,

which she was rolling round and round on her fingers, "I shall not always be making lace. I am not always making lace now," she added with a smile.

The duke studied the smile. It was the first he had seen, and his interest in it was so great that he forgot to respond to it.

"May I ask about your other occupations without impertinence?" he said. "If you would sit down and talk to me for a little, I should be much interested."

She sat down at once with the deliberate grace peculiar to her, and at the same time replied to his question: "Just now," she said, "when I am not making lace myself, I am busy teaching other girls how to make it. I began with Alice and Emily Ryecote, but now I have a dozen other pupils, and I hope to have more."

"They pay you?" the duke ventured.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, "except in so far as they master the art. It was practically lost when I took it up. Only a very degenerate kind of lace was being made."

"You are, in fact, reviving the industry," he said.

"I hope to," she replied.

"On your own initiative—nobody helping? That is a big thing to do—on your own initiative," he observed. "Doubtless you have some further plan. May I ask what it is?"

"My plan is to have a shop in London, in a fashionable neighbourhood, where I can sell our lace to the best advantage. I know the value of it, and so do the shopkeepers who would take it from us, but they do not pay us fairly. The sums they offer the workers who go to them are ridiculous. I hope to become an employer myself, and pay my workers honestly."

"You propose to keep the shop—to sell the lace yourself?" he said, looking at her always with a peculiar intentness that puzzled more than it embarrassed her.

"That is what I mean to do," she answered.

The duke saw Ella in a Bond Street shop with a pile of gold in front of her; a tribute of gold, not paid for her work, but flung down before her beauty, an acknowledgment of the gratified lust of the eye. And the duke did not like the picture. "You would have a success," he said dubiously.

"Personally, your grace means?" she suggested.

He was taken aback by her ready perception, and hesitated for an answer, but she gave him no time to reply.

"Of course," she proceeded, "I am reckoning upon that."

"Upon the effect of your beauty!" he interjected in dismay.

"I should have said personality, but since your grace puts it crudely"—she slightly shrugged her shoulders, and the rest was expressed. "After all," she resumed, "it is more candid to own it. I expect my appearance to be a help—my beauty, if you will," she added with a sigh. "Is it putting it to a baser use than my father and mother would have put it to had I been born well enough to be entitled to high preferment in the marriage market? It is customary to exploit the beauty of women in one way or another. Can it be wrong for a penniless girl to regard this valuable asset as her own bird-in-the-hand?"

The satin smoothness of her voice was tinged with melancholy as she spoke, and there was no occasion to add the "needs must" with which she concluded. The duke understood and bowed his head. Something came over Ella—an unexpected qualm of pity for this old man (old to her) with the bowed head. She wanted to help him. She thought it would make it easier for him if he understood.

"I don't mean to say that parents deliberately sell their beautiful daughters," she explained. "But the matches they encourage them to make are oftener calculated upon the worldly position of a suitor than upon his character, are they not?"

"It is true," he acknowledged, "but how do you know it?"

"How do I know it, sitting here making lace?" she answered, smiling once more—it was strange how easily she smiled that morning! How easily she talked to the duke! To her, it was as if they had known each other in some former state of existence, and were renewing their acquaintance in a burst of confidence begotten of their haste to catch up with each other again, she had so much to say to him. "How do I come to know so many things," she said, asking herself rather than him, "sitting here alone making lace?" A gold fox's head with ruby eyes was pinning the voluminous white silk scarf the duke was wearing. It caught her attention.

"I don't know. I seem to remember—such queer trifles sometimes. I seem to remember that fox's head——"

The duke, as though startled, covered the pin with his hand, and changed countenance curiously.

"I beg your pardon," she broke off hastily. "I am afraid I am indiscreet. I talk too much."

"No, no," he assured her. "I want you to talk. Go on, go on. You have not finished yet what you were going to say about a woman—trading on her beauty." He brought it out with difficulty.

She rushed at it again: "I was going to say, your grace is horrified at the suggestion, and yet it is not because the custom is unknown to you, or even that you disapprove. . . . It is the bald statement that shocks you. But isn't it right and wise for a woman in my position to face life with bald statements? In this matter, if you will be good enough to think for a moment, you will see that women are expected—are trained—to trade upon their beauty. Their lives are so arranged that there is no possibility for many of them of trading upon anything else. Half the marriages made are trade unions. The fact is repulsive in itself, but your opinion of it, your feeling about it, depends on the way the thing is done. This woman trades upon her beauty unsuccessfully, and becomes bankrupt; she had no business capacity. That one trades successfully, and you hang her portrait in your galleries, and admire her from generation to generation. There is no difference in the thing done; the difference is in your estimation of it; and your estimation is formed on the result. You heap opprobrious epithets upon the unsuccessful woman, but there is no honour too great for the one who succeeds—even at the price of her honour. Your servant girl with a baby is made an outcast, and subject to every cruel indignity that man can inflict on a woman; your king's mistress is made a duchess, and her sons' sons govern the land. Probably your poor outcast was designed by nature to become the better mother of the two." This last was an afterthought which she uttered absently.

Dumbfounded expresses the duke's condition. He did not even look at her now. His eyes were fixed on the ground. What he might be thinking was a matter of indifference to

Ella at the moment. Like most habitually silent people, once she began to speak she had to have her say out, and now she proceeded: "I must make money. My life is a life of suffering—of acute suffering." The duke looked up quickly. "I suffer for what I see here about me—my father's incessant, hopeless struggle against impossible conditions; my stepmother wearing herself to death. There can be no end to her efforts, no rest for her. Day after day she must toil till she dies. My brothers—Richard a slave to the land like my father. Robert"—she brightened a little. "There is some hope for Robert, perhaps, thanks to Adnam's enterprise. But think of his position without that hope—the pity of it! Living here in the near neighbourhood of the girl he loves, and unable to marry because he is unable in all this thinly populated, ill-cultivated district to obtain a home to live in or acres to cultivate—he, devoted to the land, a born farmer and a good man! Then my brother Luke—poor Luke! I hated him when he first came home, because I did not understand; but now I pity him. Luke is the victim of the conditions of his life, the consequence of all this"—she looked up out of the window as if she saw the sorrows she had been describing spread out before her over the fields. "But I am wearying you, I am afraid?" she broke off. "Please excuse me."

"No, no," he again assured her. "I want to hear. I had no idea a girl could——"

"Could see and think?" Ella filled in the gap when he hesitated, speaking always in that satin-smooth impartial tone which renders void of offence whatever is said. "I have read about a great change that is supposed to be coming over the world. One writer says that what life wants to amend it and make it perfect is womanly wisdom in the arrangement of it. Man without woman is only half a human being——"

"That is true," said the duke. "It might be said, too, that woman without man is only half a human being, eh? But go on. What else did you read?"

"It—the book—said that man's wisdom by itself is not only imperfect but ineffectual, because it is in women for the most part that the will and the sense to apply wisdom to practical purposes is found. Men are all theory except in matters of self-interest; then they are narrow. In proof of this it quoted

their incessant fear that the interests of women would clash with their own interests. And it is for this reason that men oppose every effort that women make to acquire wisdom, to develop the best that is in them."

"I expect your writer ignores all that men have been doing of late years to help women—higher education, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"No," was Ella's dispassionate reply. "Man's efforts in that direction were specially mentioned to show how futile it is for him to attempt to carry out even his best intentions where women are concerned without the help of women themselves. His arrangements for the better education of women have all been made without seriously consulting women themselves——"

"What do you mean by 'seriously' there, eh?"

"I mean that when they did consult women it was a mere matter of form. The women best qualified to speak had no power to enforce their opinions, and anything they said was set aside if it clashed with the man's convenience or preconceived notions. So they are educating girls as if they were boys. They have not perceived, so my writer says, that the conditions for growing girls should be different from the conditions for growing boys. The physical development of girls is a more complicated and delicate matter and should not be interfered with by anything that strains them if it is to proceed satisfactorily. In spite of this the severest mental strain is put on the girls just at the time when mental strain is most injurious; consequently all their strength is diverted to their brains, and the rest of their physical development is either retarded or stopped altogether. Look at the girls the schools turn out and you will see the truth of this, the writer says. These girls are often more like boys than girls in appearance; lean, flat-chested——"

"Jove, yes," said the duke. "There's truth in what you say. I noticed the fact—said something about it myself only the other day to——" he waived the noble name away with his hand as unnecessary. "'Girls are not what they were,' that was what I said, but I didn't know the reason. Now I see. Very interesting. But where do you get your information, my dear, books and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"I pick up books and odd magazines at the second-hand book shops when I go to Closeminster, and Mrs. Pratt lends me some, and talks to me. We have discussed all this again and again. I am repeating what she has taught me—my lessons."

"Oh! Ursula Pratt—a very attractive woman," the duke observed, glancing back as usual with retrospective regret to the days when he did not appreciate her. "You evidently remember your lessons and what you read."

"I read little and so I remember much," she said.

"I see what you mean, yes. Paradoxical, you know, but I see. People who don't read at all have the best memories—like old Ryecote. You know old Ryecote? Well, he'll tell you every word of conversation he heard forty years ago, and give you every detail of events he witnessed. You'll notice that exactness everywhere among people who cannot read and write. If you overload the mind you destroy the memory; and constantly reading snippets and clippets, and trash generally, just to pass the time, is fatal—fatal. Lord! if all that we put into our minds nowadays is ever turned out, what rubbish heaps there will be at all our doors! 'I read little and so I remember much.'" The duke found a flavour in the phrase that pleased him. He prepared to pursue the conversation in comfort by crossing his leg and clasping his ankle over a silk sock of vivid tartan. "And have you worked out, you and Mrs. Pratt, a remedy for the social imbroglio?" he asked.

"The remedy, according to Mrs. Pratt and the books, is for men to take women into their counsels," she answered. "The wisdom of man unbalanced by womanly wisdom is all lopsided. Men have no right to be satisfied with what they have done for themselves so far, working alone. What can be a greater muddle of haphazard than life as most of us are compelled to live it? And they continue to muddle along, and must continue to muddle along, until woman makes her escape and is free to develop the best that is in her. Then she will come to the rescue."

"I see," said the duke. "I see." He paused to consider. What he did see was that this girl, this splendid young creature, was exceptional. "Exceptional!" The word slipped from him unawares.

She caught it up. "Your grace thinks my thoughts peculiar, exceptional?" she said. "I can assure you that that is not the case. They are the thoughts of the Modern Woman, the product of this age. Read—if you would only read! I wish you would"—she clasped her hands toward him entreatingly. "It would mean so much to us if men could understand us."

"I am doing my best," said the duke with a smile. "Tell me about this Modern Woman. Is she like you? If so, I hope to become well acquainted with her."

"Are you *sure* I am not boring you?" she asked, looking at him wistfully. She did so want to go on, to express herself. She found herself gaining precision in the effort. There flashed through her mind a comparison of father to son, and it was the father she found most satisfying—to talk to.

"Boring me?" said the duke. "No! I don't know when I have been so interested. Conversation is the best of all the arts, the only one within reach of all; the one that never palls, but becomes more enjoyable the older we grow; the most satisfactory in every way when conducted with polite consideration. That amenity is essential. But go on, if you please. Tell me about the Modern Woman, if, that is to say, *you* are not bored with the subject."

She set the possibility aside with a smile. "I was going to call your attention to the great awakening that there is amongst women all over the world," she went on. "Women the most widely separated, of different nations, speaking different languages, holding little or no communication with each other, are all thinking on the same lines, making the same efforts, clamouring for the same rights so long withheld from them. There is only one way to account for this general awakening. It is evolutionary. It is the outcome of a great involuntary effort of the human race to lift itself up a step higher in the scale of its development. The woman who can think is endowed with a sense of the ludicrous, the sense that is at once the most destructive of abuses and the most constructive of remedies. It was a woman, you know, who first made a list of the ludicrous inconsistencies of man, the divergence between his precepts and his practices; the absurdities of his religious teaching, particularly the crowning absurdity which sets up a Prince of Peace and calls upon Him to bless our arms and

fight for us in times of war. By finding food for laughter in world-old controversies, woman has taken the bitterness out of them. And, with the bitterness, ill-nature goes and good-nature comes in with the determination to do good work."

"Ah," said the duke, shaking his head, "very like a woman, you know, very like a woman! Women never see the necessity——"

"What they do see and believe is that when men lay down laws for the conduct of life they must know that it is possible to keep these laws, and they—the women—would see to it that the laws were kept," Ella concluded.

"Well, dear child," said the duke, uncrossing his leg and putting his foot down in both senses of the word, "your writer is a clever woman—must be a woman, I think—and if she has proof of her points, illustrations to back her assertions, there is—well, there is something in them. The Awakening of Women, eh? The moral weight—which they certainly would have—brought to bear on all the affairs of life, eh? Revolutionary, of course; but, still—! So you are a Modern in spite of yourself, you think? The microbe has caught you without 'by your leave, please'? But does Mrs. Pratt agree with these views?"

"Yes, with most of them," Ella answered. "But she says that there is a tendency amongst women to let go more than they are striving to gain; that in their desire for power, though it is the power to do good that they desire, they are letting go the source of their power, their spirituality."

It was in Ella herself that Mrs. Pratt had observed the tendency. Ella's intellectual life was full and rich, but the spiritual part of her was starved. When this is the case, there is always danger; for it is not the blood but the spirit that is life. The seat of the intellect is the brain; that is known; but who shall say whence the spirit comes or where it lodges? When there is intellect without spirit something is always lacking, something beautiful and also protective. This is seen both in the individual and in the aggregate of individuals of which the body politic is composed. Where is Rome now? Rome in her glory and might has passed and gone, as all the nations before her passed and are gone, whose power was intellectual and physical only. The vital spark in the spiritual nature of man-

kind is the true source of light both to the individual and to the race. The man who keeps his little lamp of the spirit burning brightly, not only sees his own way clearly but helps to dispel the general darkness that envelops the world. But the lamp of the spirit must be tended and fed, or it dies, and the darkness comes and stays.

The duke looked about him. He looked at the grandfather clock and noticed the time. He looked at the white china dogs on the high mantelshelf, and noticed their orange spots. He noticed the wooden arms of the windsor chair in which he was sitting, and the other chairs about the room; the coloured prints from the illustrated papers on the walls, the tapestry carpet on the floor—all the homely furnishings of the farmhouse parlour. And he thought of Ella. Without looking at her, he saw her in contrast to her surroundings, a wonder-woman astray; a jewel of beauty sordidly set, but shining a jewel nevertheless. And surely unsafe?

"There is one important factor in the lives of men and women to be reckoned with seriously," he said at last. "You have not touched upon it. I mean love. Does the Modern Woman leave love out of her calculations?"

The faint wild rose tint showed on the warm pallor of her face, but she met the question bravely. "No, how can she ignore it?" she asked. "She must consider love."

"But how, eh?" said the duke. "What does she make of it? Something different, surely? She cannot see it as women used to see it."

"No," Ella agreed. "Her attitude towards it is bound to be different. It is less concentrated. She gives more love to humanity at large, less to the individual. She has a sense of proportion. No one thing is her whole existence. Marianna nowadays would not stay alone long in the Moated Grange. She would try change of air."

The duke laughed. "Evidently," was his conclusion, "this girl knows no more about love than a child."

"But, tell me," he asked, "how are you going to work it out, your scheme—your life, I mean?"

"I have told your grace," she answered quietly. "My ambition centres on the power to relieve such suffering as I see. The power is money. I can make lace which is worth money,

and I can exploit my personal appearance to attract customers to buy my lace."

"You come back to that point?"

"Yes, and your grace still winces." She twinkled a smile at him. "Let me put it differently. You hear 'My face is my fortune, sir, she said,' and you are not shocked. You think it a spirited answer. It is what you are accustomed to hear. My meaning is put in an unconventional form and you wince. Yet my meaning is not so coarse as the milkmaid's. She was prepared to sell herself. I only mean to sell my lace."

"True," he acknowledged, "true. Yet it does give one a shock. A young girl, you know. So deliberate. Older people——"

"Exploit the young girl? In that case it is certainly 'poor young girl'!"

"But in your case—the danger! the risk!"

"Danger and risk raise the spirits of the Modern Woman," she answered, smiling again. The smile had hovered on her face all the time. "I know something of both already. As the daughter of a common tenant-farmer, I am exposed to 'danger and risk' even here." Her face clouded, her voice deepened. "Exposed to insult from a certain sort of man if he is in a superior position." She was showing emotion now for the first time. "I am no fool naturally, your grace," she went on passionately. "I should have dared in any case to face the facts of life, to learn what to expect, the evil as well as the good, that I might be prepared for any chance that might befall me. And I had the inestimable advantage of being brought up by a clever old grandmother, who taught me the art of self-defence. She told me that girls like me are considered fair game, are regularly recruited by men of means for the streets. I know what your grace means by 'danger and risk,' thanks to her." The duke crimsoned. He could not take his eyes from her face. She drew herself up and added proudly: "I am not for the streets."

"No! no!" he exclaimed, more startled at the moment by the vile possibility than by the fact of her having given expression to it. But he did not like that either. Yet no one knew better than he that it was the truth, and that her best means of defence was to face it boldly, in all its loathsome ugliness.

The old inconsistency of men which makes ignorance a womanly charm, and the consequence of ignorance a disgrace, confused him.

He took up his hat and looked into it. "There is one thing I should like to say," he began. "One warning I should like to give you, if I may. You may not have calculated upon yourself, your own feelings. Let me warn you against yourself. You may love"—he made an effort—"you may love the wrong man."

He had put his finger on the weak spot in her armour of defence, but she did not know it, and she laughed.

"You think there is no danger in that?" he said. "Well, I hope not. But I have known women, self-respecting women, mistaken in themselves when the time came—betrayed by, er—by nature."

She made no reply, and there was a short silence. Then the duke said, as if speaking to himself. "Of course, there is marriage." Having spoken he looked at her keenly.

"Of course there is marriage," she repeated tranquilly.

"You have thought of marriage then?" he asked quickly.

"I had the possibility pointed out to me lately by a man—I rather respect," she answered in a tone of indifference. "He mentioned the matter in order to assure me that it was not possible for him to offer me marriage."

"A difficulty that could be got over, money and all that sort of thing, perhaps?" said the duke, his suspicion lighting on the wrong man. "The obstacle may be removed?"

"It may," she replied, without embarrassment or heightened colour. "But love and marriage—! I have noticed in my reading, and in what I have seen of life, that it is hazardous for a woman to stake much on the cast of that die. It is all what you called just now 'a sporting chance.' In the meantime I prefer a certainty, and I see some certainty in the shop."

The duke nodded, and, at the same time, he rose to go.

"Tell me," he said, "were you happy when you lived with your grandmother?"

"I was," she answered, "though I didn't know it at the time."

"Ah!" he said. "That happens to all of us. Most of our

happiness is retrospective. The thing is to learn to live in the moment; to realise, to say to oneself as one goes along, 'This is happiness!' But upon the whole——?" He hesitated.

"Have I been happy?" She reflected. "I have youth, and health, and pleasure in my work," was what she found for an answer. It was as much a question.

"That is good," he said. "Good things, those, all of them; youth, and health, and pleasure in work. I couldn't, with all my means, have given you one of those good things."

He spoke as if the intention to bestow good things upon her was in his mind.

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers. Soft and cool and white it lay in his, and he looked at it as if he were examining its shape and texture.

All through the interview she had been conscious of his eyes perusing her face with serious intentness. He took a last look now before he dropped her hand, and, at the same time, he said to himself, speaking aloud, unconsciously: "I should like to kiss her."

Ella's inclination was to laugh, but she kept her countenance. He had set some chord of emotion vibrating in her that had never been touched before. She felt strongly drawn to him, strangely exhilarated. If he had kissed her, it would have seemed to her at the moment natural and right.

"Well, good-bye," he said. "I don't know when I have been so interested in any one—any one's conversation. I have quite enjoyed our talk. I must see you again. Er—yes. See you again, you know—*Ella*. Good-bye!" He had hesitated over her name, but pronounced it finally as if it were more than a mere name to him. "Do you know," he added, "why the 'bye' in 'good-bye' is spelt with an 'e'?" She looked at him interrogatively. "Because 'good-bye' is a contraction. It stands for 'God be with ye.'" He took his hat and walked away with it in his hand.

He left Ella more puzzled than anything. His parting benediction, doubtless put in that eccentric form to make it easy of utterance by one unaccustomed to bless, yet evidently meant, confused the whole issue. Why had he come? Why had he made her a present of a hundred pounds? The lace? No, that was an excuse. Could he possibly know or suspect? Had

Melton spoken?—Her stepmother's voice broke in upon her cogitations.

"Who's that you were talking to just now?" she called from the kitchen.

"The Duke of Castlefield Saye," Ella answered, hurriedly catching up her lace-pillow and taking her usual seat in the window.

"Get out!" her stepmother called, laughing as at a joke.

Ella laughed, too, at her incredulity, but she did not deceive her. The truth would have caused much curiosity and questioning, and Ella was particularly anxious not to be questioned, partly because of the money, which she meant to keep as a nest egg—if she kept it at all. Why a doubt on that subject should suddenly obtrude she did not ask herself. Had she been questioned, she might have been obliged to lie or prevaricate to conceal the transaction, and Ella would have hated to do either.

"I suppose it was that idle scamp, Luke," her stepmother pursued. Ella let her suppose so. "When the Duke of Castlefield Saye takes to paying you morning calls, my girl, look out, for you'll either be going very high up in the world or very low down," the voice from the kitchen concluded.

The words lingered in Ella's mind that day, a refrain to all her thoughts.

The duke had meant it when he spoke of the pleasure the conversation had given him. As they talked, the sense of loneliness from which he suffered chronically had fallen from him, his heart had expanded, he was suffused with the pleasure that comes of congenial companionship. Ella's composure had affected him unpleasantly at first, as being unnatural in so young a girl; but as he walked away from Red Rose Farm, with the whole interview fresh in his mind, her demeanour appeared to him to be unusual merely—that was it, unusual. The girl was altogether unusual, but there could be no objection to that. After a little further reflection, he let "unusual" in her case stand for "original"; and found himself admiring the trait. The mystery of heredity presented itself to his mind. Involuntarily he found himself comparing Ella to Ann: Ella so capable, self-reliant, self-possessed; Ann so deplorably

the reverse. But then, you see, Ann's life would be different; there was comfort in that. Ella's strength of character was a wise provision of nature, she would want it all. Ann would always be protected. But would she? Were there no temptations, no dangers, no difficulties for such as she? Was it certain that she would never have to rely upon herself? that there would always be some one near her to decide for her and to decide rightly? Cases the duke had known strove to rise to the surface of his mind, but he pushed them back. He would see to it that Ann was well protected. Poor little delicate Ann! But what a contrast! The family certainly wanted new blood in it. The Brabant stock had lost its vigour. This other girl—the duke burst into poetry:

*“‘O imperial moulded form!
And beauty such as woman never wore
Until it came, a kingdom's curse, in thee!’”*

He stopped short, startled. He was back in the morning doing his devoir to his duchess. He saw the room, the fresh cool chintzes, the clock he would not look at. He smelt the fragrance of roses. He heard her exclaim: “Oh, I wish you had not said it.” “Said what?” he asked himself now, and the answer came in that last quotation. But he would not have it. He refused to consider it. Superstition—silly nonsense. Sign of debility—anæmia of the brain. It does not do for a man to live with anæmic women. They sap his strength. They are vampires living on the vitality of the healthy. What a stimulant that girl was! Truly—

*“‘’Tis life of which our nerves are scant,
O life, not death, for which I pant!
More life and fuller than I want!’”*

The duke stepped out vigorously. That was his omen, if omen there must be. Life! How good it is to be alive—when you know how to live!

CHAPTER XXV

ADNAM stood by the brook in his Orchard, deep in thought. His eyes were dreamily fixed on the running water; his ears were filled with the music of it, murmur and splash. He had a good deal to think about, but nothing to fear, so far as he knew; yet he was troubled just then all the same, troubled about something that had come to his knowledge the night before—a Sunday night. The evenings' entertainments to Adnam's men had gone on successfully, but Seraph had kept up his opposition to them, and consistently refused to take part in them. He had objected lately on the score of unfairness. He said that it was not treating the labourers on his father's property well to make such a difference between them and these newcomers from nobody knew where. This argument had not occurred to him of itself; it had been suggested by some grumbling among old Emery's men which had come to his ears. On the face of it there seemed to be reason in the complaint, but Emery set it aside as inapplicable under the circumstances. Had he entertained some of his own men and not others, he held that those left out would have had a legitimate grievance, but that the difference in the position of his men and Adnam's justified a difference in their treatment. The labourers on his property were permanently employed, married men, with comfortable homes and families growing up about them. They did not want for society among themselves, nor for the means of entertaining each other if they chose to make use of them. Adnam's men on the other hand were wayfarers in a strange neighbourhood. They had been inhospitably received, and shunned on suspicion by the ignorant country people, and were accordingly isolated from human fellowship, and thrown exclusively on each other's company for relaxation. Few of them could hope that the job they were engaged upon would be permanent. They were living a hard life in camp, separated from their families, those of them who had families, and probably most of them had, though they all denied it. There were mechanics and tradesmen among them doing navvy's work, and doing it conscientiously, rather than remain

unemployed and live on charity. They were behaving themselves admirably upon the whole, and it behoved all who called themselves Christians and understood the position, to do what they could to help them to bear their hardships.

But Seraph would not see it, and the disagreement continued.

The previous evening, after the men had gone, Emery sent Adnam with a message to his brother to remind him that he was to drive to Closeminster early the following morning to see to some business in connection with the stock. Adnam found Seraph in his own room, sitting at a table upon which two candles were burning. The only other things on the table were a bottle of brandy, almost empty, the remains of a syphon of soda-water, and a large tumbler. And Seraph was too helplessly drunk to understand the message that Adnam had brought him.

The discovery was a shock. It was an honourable tradition in the family that no Pratt had ever been drunken or dissolute. But then, until Emery had fallen a victim to a showy anæmic town girl, whose highest ideal of earthly bliss was to live the life of a parasite in luxurious idleness, the Pratts had always mated with sane and healthy country girls, notable housewives, who found happiness in the punctual performance of every duty of their position. But Adnam was not old enough to account for Seraph's decadence. All that he saw in it was danger and disgrace. He knew that secret drinking is a bad form of the vice, and feared for the trouble it might bring on his father, who, as he grew older, would naturally have to rely more and more upon Seraph in their joint management of the property. His only hope was that this lapse was exceptional, but it accounted plausibly enough for much in Seraph's demeanour that he had never understood, to make him fear that it might be habitual. The danger of it became immediately apparent, for Seraph, making a tipsy grab at the brandy bottle, knocked over one of the candlesticks, and the candle rolled off the table on to the floor, where it lay, still burning, while Seraph sat, stupidly blinking at it with a fatuous smile, as if it amused him to see it there. If he had been alone, the house would probably have been burnt down. The possibility of his being often alone in this condition occurred to Adnam, and de-

stroyed his sense of security. How could he ever sleep in peace again with this kind of thing threatening—not that his own peace mattered; and fortunately they were alone on the same floor; it would be possible to keep an eye on Seraph without disturbing anybody.

But the point that was troubling Adnam just now was, what ought he to do? Should he speak to his father? It might be a false alarm, and in that case what a pity to disturb him! But, then, on the other hand, it might not be a false alarm, in which case immediate action would be desirable—if there were anything to be done. Adnam decided to watch and wait.

He had strolled away from the brook to the other side of the Orchard while cogitating, and now he became aware of a broad good-natured face, crowned by a ridiculous little sailor hat, beaming at him over the hedge with friendly signals. Adnam recognised the duke. An English yeoman's son, pure bred, would have touched his cap or lifted it an inch and awkwardly; but Adnam, clicking his heels together, swung his hat clear, down to his knee, and at the same time bowed from his waist. It was the natural salute of any acquaintance of the duke's from one end of the Continent to the other, but how had Adnam acquired the trick? His mother would not teach him, and it was not likely that he had ever seen any one make such a bow. The duke once more pondered on the mystery of heredity. But Adnam's bow reminded him of pleasant times abroad where such bows are normal. He saluted Adnam in German, and Adnam, in German, prayed the duke to put his gracious feet to the trouble of entering; in English he silently hoped that the old gentleman would be merciful in the matter of wasting his time.

The duke, standing on tip-toe to look over the hedge, snuffed a savoury fragrance. It was the men's dinner time. "I've been told you're making a garden, Adnam," he said; "I should have thought it was a kitchen"—and he snuffed again—"kitchen garden, eh? That's it!" He stopped to appreciate this pleasantry, then added: "I'm coming in," and began to walk towards the gate, Adnam accompanying him on the inner side of the hedge. To Adnam the duke at fifty-eight was old, and he would have called him "pottery."

"Well, Adnam, my boy," he said, after a preliminary survey, "and how does your garden grow? Silver bells, and cockleshells, and pretty maids all in a row, eh?—as you used to say when you were a little fellow and came to play with Lady Ann." The duke was pleased with himself for remembering the nursery rhyme. "Bell-glasses though for pretty maids, eh?" He tapped one of these with his stick. "Well! more profitable, more profitable." He had forgotten what "pretty maids" stood for, or perhaps had never known. Only one sort of "pretty maid" had ever interested the duke. "But, good Lord!" he exclaimed, looking round, "what a change! Do you mean to say you've done all this yourself in a few months—converted the old orchard and that lay field (I remember them as far back as I remember anything) into this formal set-out—mathematical precision and all that sort of thing, eh? Walks at right angles, beds, glass, and those fountain things? A whole system of irrigation, eh? And done it all yourself?"

"Seen it done, sir," said Adnam, with his infectious smile. "Everything has been in my favour—rich soil, water in plenty, and I've had luck with my men—and with the weather, too. It's been a wonderful year for outdoor work."

"But how on earth did you think of it?" said the duke, "how did you find out about it? Composts now and close planting, and all that sort of thing? Nobody here knew anything about it till you began, and now the whole jargon of intensive culture is in the air. Can't help catching it."

They had come to the tents, under the old chestnut-trees. The men were dining at a long table in the shade. They stood up when the duke approached.

"Sit down, sit down," he said, waving his stick at them. "Jove! the smell of your dinner makes one feel hungry. I'll just look into the tents, Adnam."

Fusty Ginger and his mate, in white coats and caps, did the honours of the cooking tent, and Corporal Locke stood to attention in the other. Here the mattresses were rolled up and the bedding folded as in a barrack room; and all was in perfect order. The duke returned to the table. Speech-making was not usually his forte, but he was under the influence of an inspiration.

"I should, er, like to express my gratification," he said. "Extremely interesting, unique, I may say. And highly creditable—creditable. All these months here and no sickness to speak of. Nor misconduct. And all this work done"—he waved his stick in a circle generous enough to indicate the cultivation of the whole county—"splendid. A great credit to you. The kind of thing that makes one proud to be an Englishman—Englishman (cheers). I'd like to see you settled in the neighbourhood, my men. You'd be a credit to any neighbourhood. I'm not for exiling our best men to the Colonies. We want them at home. There's always room in the old country for a good man—and woman," he added. This was greeted with laughter and cheers.

"If your grace would say so 'in another place' something might be done to make it possible," a quiet, refined voice put in.

The duke paused to look for the speaker, and discovered him, not at table with the other men, but standing apart. He swept his cap from his head, gave the duke a look direct, and replaced it. The interruption had not disconcerted the duke, but the sight of the man did, he half raised his own hat. The action did not seem significant, and only one man particularly noticed it. The man was Fusty Ginger. He had been keenly intent on all that passed between the two, but he made no sign.

"Eh, well, yes," the duke recommenced, with difficulty. "I will do what I can to oblige you, I promise you." He looked hard at his interrupter. The man bowed. "I am glad to have seen you all," the duke proceeded. "Quite an occasion." He turned to Adnam. "You are a young, er, Boss—isn't that the word, Mr. Adnam?" This brought down the house. "No need to apologise for his age, though," the duke proceeded genially, addressing the men. "You've heard of old heads on young shoulders?" The men assented. "Well, now you see one!" More laughter. "Deal well by him then, and I'll undertake to say he'll deal well by you. (Hear, hear.) I'll give you a motto. It's the Englishman's motto in all lands. It's the motto that's won the Englishman the respect of the world—Be Loyal!" The men approved. "I wish you a good appetite, and a good dinner every day," he concluded.

The men struck up, "For he's a jolly good fellow," as the

duke turned to go. When they settled down to dinner again, much enlivened by the little interlude, a voice of mourning was upraised. It was the melancholy man: "My Irish stew's cold," he said.

"I betted there'd be something!" said Fusty Ginger. "If an aingel from 'eaven visited you, you'd compline that the light of 'is countenance 'urt your bally eyes."

The duke never felt better than after that speech. There was talk at the time of getting into touch with the people, and he felt that he had come into touch. He liked the sensation.

"By the way," he said, "who was the man that spoke?"

"A man called Mickleham," Adnam answered.

"Reads the papers with attention, eh? Startling to hear that sort of man talk familiarly about 'another place.' What is he?"

"A mystery to me," Adnam answered. "Not a workman, I'm sure. He plays the violin like Paganini, and talks like a gentleman. What he has to do he does thoroughly, but we only give him light jobs."

"Why do you keep him?" the duke asked.

"To please my mother. She likes him."

"Humph," said the duke. Then he changed the subject. A wind was rising, and the sky was becoming overcast. "You'll not be able to keep them under canvas through the winter," he remarked.

Adnam looked anxiously at the weather. "That's what I fear," he answered, "and there isn't a roof hereabouts that I could get to cover them for love or money. One thing, there won't be so many to keep. I am beginning to weed them out. It's gardeners I must have now, and few of them have any aptitude for the work, fewer still any knowledge of it."

"Shanties!" the duke exclaimed, as if he had unexpectedly come upon shanties, blocking the way. "That's it. You must run up some shanties. Corrugated iron, and all that sort of thing. Easy matter, eh?"

"Easy enough if one had——" Adnam hesitated.

"Money, eh? Bother money, eh? Now, let's see. I'm a practical man myself. I like to look into things. There were business men in my mother's family. It's a great thing to get new blood into a family. Brings new ideas, don't you see.

There was your father, you know. And here *you* are. Remarkable men have remarkable mothers. If you look into things, it's surprising what you find. There's something in all things working together for good—when they don't work together for evil. It cuts both ways in my experience. Things do. If they don't go that way, they go this, you see. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do—how we'll manage it. I wish I wasn't so far off myself. I could have helped you to some cottages, but I'm too far off. But this is what I suggest. *I'll* find the money. Put it into the concern, you know. Isn't that the jargon? You get your estimates, and send them to me. That'll make it all right."

"But," Adnam objected, "when you put money into a concern you expect to be able to get it out again. Suppose this concern is a failure?" Adnam was confident enough of his own success, but doubts came crowding on the duke's behalf.

"I'll take my chance of that," the duke said genially. "Sporting chance, you know. More my line, if you come to think of it, than the other thing. You'll accept my offer, Adnam? Give me the pleasure, don't you know—a real pleasure, let me tell you. Near neighbours, your father and I, all our lives. I've a great respect for your father. And I like to be neighbourly. Mrs. Pratt too. I'm a great admirer of hers. Always have been." He paused. "There's another splendid creature in this neighbourhood," he resumed, apparently wandering from the point, "a magnificent girl——"

"Ella Banks," Adnam concluded.

"Ah, you recognise her! Magnificent! No other word to describe her adequately. You admire her too—eh?"

The "eh" was impatient, for Adnam had hesitated. He had recognised her by the "magnificent," yet was uncertain if he admired her, uncertain because he had never thought of her in that sense, the duke's sense; never asked himself whether he admired, or liked, or anything. She was just Ella to him, herself as he was himself.

But the duke went on. "Not the same thing as Mrs. Pratt, of course. Mrs. Pratt is a poem. Ella—that her name? Ella is a picture, a masterpiece. God's handiwork, not the creation of His Spirit. That is Mrs. Pratt. But Ella—sort of thing that makes one know, don't you know; not feel, think, or be-

lieve, but *know*, for a fact—that the duchess is right, that there *are* souls which must get back to earth somehow—reincarnate—that's the word! and have to make the best of the means at their disposal. They're not particular. Can't be. Case is too urgent. So here is a magnificent girl got into these wilds"—he swept his stick round vehemently—"somehow."

He broke off abruptly, and changed the subject. "My respects to Mrs. Pratt," he said. "She is well, I hope?"

"Quite well, thank you," Adnam answered. "But will you not come in, sir, and see my mother?"

The duke hesitated. "I am afraid she will be busy," he said.

"Oh, she is always busy," Adnam answered, smiling; "but she always has time, too. She is expecting the duchess to-day."

"Ah!" said the duke, getting up steam at once. "Not to-day, thank you. I must go. My respects to your mother. You'll send me that estimate—specification—or whatever the damned word is." He had become irritated since the duchess was mentioned. "Better lose no time." He surveyed the heavens with disapproval. "Weather uncertain. Damned climate, you know, damned changeable. Good day."

He stood another moment, looking at the sky, and stroking the site of his whiskers; then walked away abruptly, leaving Adnam to reflect that he had made no adequate acknowledgment of his kindness. Adnam, in truth, was somewhat stunned. The duke with his small command of language could make a great impression. His position helped him, of course. Words, like stones, gather weight in proportion to the height from which they fall. But the duke must also have been able to use the art of suggestion, for, having few words, he somehow made every one of them significant.

The men were merry in camp that evening. They were often merry in camp. Out on the high road the passers-by at night, hearing music, loud laughter, and noisy talk, going on, hearing also of the Sunday evening entertainments at Pratt's Place, shook their heads; and the vague fear that something was wrong because the men marched into church, became an openly expressed conviction that something ought to be done;

but everybody thought that somebody else should do it. Lena's designation of the contingent on its first appearance as "Adnam's brutal and licentious soldiery" had, of course, been generally approved. People believe evil of their neighbours on suspicion; of the good in them they require the most ample proof. There is never smoke without fire, they say, which is true, but the analogy is false; for there is many a slanderous story without a word of truth in it.

Nobody believed that mere cheerfulness could account for the loud mirth of Adnam's men. In all the experience of that countryside only one source of cheerfulness had ever been discovered, and that was beer; therefore beer was called in to account for the gay spirits of the camp, and riot and drunkenness were supposed to be the prevailing diversions. The fact that no beer was allowed in camp was not taken into consideration, as it did not accord with the popular conclusion; and an anonymous suggestion which got about, that good food, good money, and fairly easy hours, conditions in themselves highly favourable to health of body and mind, accounted satisfactorily for the high spirits of the men, was also scouted; probably because these sources of good humour were unknown in any practical sense to the resident labouring class.

It was Fusty Ginger who began the diversions on the evening of the duke's visit.

Adnam's idea for the Sunday entertainment of the men had been rudimentary at first, a mere echo of the general trend of his mother's teaching. His first intention was to amuse the men. Her suggestion that they should provide for their own amusement was an inspiration of the moment, and a happy one. The men took to it kindly and at once.

In music the camp did well. Some of the Army Reserve men had been in the bands of their regiments, and played several instruments passably. Said instruments, being all in pawn to begin with, they gradually redeemed as they could. And, of course, there was Mickleham. But it had somehow come to be understood that he ranked even higher than Mrs. Pratt and Mr. Adnam, to whom a request to play or sing might be respectfully proffered without offence on occasion. Mickleham was not to be asked. They must wait till the spirit moved him.

For singers they had men who could take parts fairly well in glees and choruses, and one soloist in the person of Fusty Ginger, who unexpectedly came forward with a very true tenor voice of pleasant quality. The difficulty with Fusty was that only his voice could be trusted. His taste was apt to betray him, especially when his sense of humour was lively; and the most careful supervision had to be exercised in the choice of his songs.

Fusty was not discouraged. Keeping songs of the condemned kind for the camp, he fished up more conventional matter from some other corner of his mind, and found soul-satisfying relaxation in it, besides scoring a success.

But he was never trusted to sing at Pratt's Place without a previous rehearsal and the stimulating threat that if he did not keep to the approved programme, he would be turned out of camp in a suit of tar and feathers.

This was the evening of his rehearsal for the coming Sunday. It was just over. He had been in the vein to offer the impossible for the consideration of his judges, and the men, seated round the crackling fire, were suffering now from reaction after a riot of mirth. The fall of their spirits from a great height had shaken and jarred their nerves. They became sensible of the darkness that enclosed the little circle of light in which they sat about the fire. The dread vastness of the blue-black vault above them, the cold glittering aloofness of the stars, depressed them with a sense of their own nothingness in the scheme of things; here to-day and gone to-morrow, that was what they had to expect. Hunger and thirst and fatigue in the past, and always uncertainty. Good men or bad, drunken or sober, honest or dishonest, it mattered little which they were, the end was the same. Indispensable at this moment, they were warmed and fed and clothed and housed; but what of the future? The night air struck a chill to their hearts. The leaves rustled as if the old chestnut-trees were whispering together; the brook babbled, a busybody, full of itself; the sound of the sea was sorrowful. What can the workman expect? He knows. He has had it all before. Hunger and thirst and fatigue; no settled home; uncertainty everywhere, always.

The men had become silent, foreboding, expectant. It was

as if they were waiting for something to happen, something untoward. Mickleham was the only one amongst them seemingly unaffected by the general depression. Whether he was unaware of it, or whether he was simply ignoring it, no one could have said. He was always inscrutable. Until the night when he suddenly leaped to the front with his music, he had passed unnoticed among the men, but since then they had felt that there was something uncanny about him, something with which they did not care to meddle. The feeling was superstitious, but not unfriendly. He was certainly not one of themselves, nor one of any class with which they were acquainted; what was he then? He conformed in all things to the rules of the camp, and his ways were much the same as their own. There were differences, of course, but only such as may distinguish any one man from another, and they would not have been specially noticed in one of the other men; but in him, because he puzzled them and anything might prove a clue, the smallest difference seemed important. He did not go away when he wanted to be alone, he just sat still, and it was as if he had surrounded himself with a rampart. When the others slept, they were often uneasy, snoring, muttering, tossing, Mickleham never moved. From the moment he drew the covering up to his chin he was still; so still that he seemed to disappear. At all events, the men lost consciousness of his presence. But this happened at other times. He had a way of disappearing from their minds, though he might be sitting amongst them, and of reappearing as a personality, intensely vivid and interesting. He could take the men completely out of themselves when he chose, and change the whole feeling of the camp on a disputed point in a few moments.

The one difference that the men could lay their finger on, as they would have said, was that Mickleham did not eat the same food, nor at the same times, as they did. He was cooking something now in a little saucepan on a hot corner of the fire, stirring the contents with one hand, and with the other shading his eyes from the light. The men had only become aware of his presence since their spirits went down; but now, sitting and lying about, they watched him as if his occupation were a performance of which they expected something unusual to be the result.

The melancholy man, who was always interested in food, broke the silence at last. "You find that soots yer consti-tooshun?" he said at a venture, not knowing in the least what "that" was.

Mickleham nodded. This was not illuminating, but the melancholy man felt encouraged.

"A working man requires good victuals," he informed the camp. "I believe in victuals myself." The camp agreed with a grunt.

"So do I," said Mickleham. "As a man eats, so he is. What makes man? Food! If your doctor pays no attention to diet, pay no attention to your doctor. Wrong diet is at the bottom of all our ills; right diet is the only cure. You've heard tell of the Divine in man? Vaguely, eh? Not come across the notion much? Let me tell you, there should be a spark of the Divine in every man, and there might be. Food determines our thoughts and our actions. By food man makes of himself a temple fit for the living God, or a burial-place full of putrefying animal matter."

"A man like me must eat what he can get," said the melancholy man.

"A man like you gets what he eats," was the reply.

"Not much—if 'e 'as a wife," said the carpenter.

A grim chuckle from several of the men confirmed this statement.

"I'll back Shoemaker to get wot 'e likes, wife or no wife," Fusty Ginger declared. "I got to 'ave my eye on 'is appetite w'en I'm ordering, or I gets what-for from 'im every time. Talk about wemin's tongues! W'en Shoemaker gets goin' on 'is victuals, 'e'd jaw any woman alive into 'er grave at one meal!"

The melancholy man showed interest in this tribute: "Wot's life for the working man," he said, "but a battle? 'E's got to fight for 'is life from the cradle to the grave; an' it's well fur 'im to be armed against all 'is enemies."

"'Is wife included?" Fusty asked.

"'Is wife's tongue included if she 'ave too much of it," the melancholy man observed philosophically.

"Well, anyway, I never knowed a man amount to much yet as was allus thinkin' an' talkin' about victuals," said the carpenter.

"'Man shall not live by bread alone,'" Mickleham reminded them.

"You've got to get the bread though," the melancholy man persisted, "or the other things won't 'ave much of a chance."

"My experience is, an' I've knocked about the world a bit, that if a man's worth 'is salt 'e gets 'is salt," Corporal George Locke remarked.

"That's the kind o' thing as looks well on paper," the melancholy man rejoined, "but it don't work out in practice. I'd say we was all pretty well worth our salt in this 'ere camp or we shouldn't get no salt. Adnam Pratt's not the boy to be givin' ye anything for nothin'——"

"'E's just," Locke put in.

"'E's just," the melancholy man conceded. "I'm not blamin' of 'im. I'd do the same myself. But that's not the pint—my pint. Wot I'm arskin' is, wot next? This job 'as bin a good job, I allow, but it's pretty well played out fur most on us"

His voice dropped. Some one sighed deeply. The men looked at Mickleham. He had put the little saucepan down on the ground beside him, and was sitting, chin on chest, deep in thought. There was an appeal to him in the men's eyes and in their silence, but Fusty Ginger was the first to speak. The mystic night had gripped him. A consciousness of the vastness, of the immeasurable distance of the coldly glittering star-sprinkled sky, forced itself upon him, and overwhelmed him. He had a sense as of danger awaiting him out there in the dark. He felt in himself a strange yearning for something which at the same time he knew to be unattainable, and that something was safety. First, to ease the ache of it, he sang to himself softly the opening lines of a ribald song with which he had just been convulsing the camp:

*"There was a little Japanese
So very apt at catching fleas——"*

Then he spoke: "Ay, wot's to become of us?" he answered addressing Mickleham. "Tell us, man of mystery. You know!"

Mickleham looked into Fusty's eyes a moment, and held him still.

"There is a greater mystery than me in front of you," he said impressively; "close in front. I advise you to prepare yourself for that."

Fusty, shrinking into himself and shivering, withdrew his eyes with an effort and fixed them on the fire. The men glanced about them furtively. No one spoke. They were compelled to listen. The night seemed suddenly filled with sound. A sharp gust of wind tore through the leaves overhead, and passed; and, like a procession, audible but not visible, the noise of the sea came out of the distance, roared in their ears, and passed. At the same time, on the further side of the fire, a figure grew out of the darkness, like a wraith of mist taking shape, and there was a note of music, as if some one, singing, prolonged the one word "Come!" with supernatural sweetness. This sound also passed and died in the distance, and darkness was where the figure had been. Then the men found themselves released from the Influence.

The whole impression may have been momentary; they thought not, but they could not tell. What did Mickleham think? They turned to him for an explanation. There was no Mickleham to ask, nor any sign that he had ever been there. Where Mickleham had set his little saucepan the last time they saw him move it, Fusty Ginger was stretched, resting on his elbow, smiling happily, like one who has received glad tidings of great joy.

To those who live out in the open, there come strange moments of illumination, strange beautiful assurances. In the crowd and din of life man is oppressed with loneliness. But out there in the open his suffering soul is released from its dread isolation and sees itself one with nature and with God, companioned and comprehended through all eternity in the gracious unity, the one perfection, of which he can only grasp with his finite faculties that fugitive foretaste known to him as Love.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN nature there is always a voice, a sound suggestive of sibilant whispers. The sound is elusive if attention is strained to catch its meaning, and it is never articulate in the sense that the spoken word is articulate; but when, for a blissful interval, thought is suspended, there comes to our apprehension an understanding of it which is not of the mind, and not to be conveyed as a rule from one mind to another for want of the power to express it by any physical means possible to us. Ursula Pratt was familiar with the voice; it was seldom beyond reach of her consciousness: and there were times when the little duchess, her disciple, became aware of it; when there came to her a swift flash of illumination, a knowledge of things of which it might be said that she could have no knowledge, things not to be surmised by any sort of conjecture of which she was mentally capable. For some time past she had been tantalised by these flashes, as a traveller lost on a dark night in a dangerous place is tantalised by the lightning that comes, making vividly clear every detail of his surroundings, and goes, plunging him in darkness again before he has had time to mark his way. To these two ladies it was always as if a cloud hung over the district; as if something were brewing, some catastrophe, of which they were privileged to be warned, without, however, being allowed to foresee what was threatening with sufficient distinctness to avert the danger.

Yet, to all appearance, when they turned out the light by bringing their minds to bear upon the subject, there was nothing wrong. The neighbourhood was just as it had always been, with only such change as comes inevitably with changing seasons and advancing years. So these ladies persuaded themselves when they were together, cosily chatting, with a fire burning brightly on the hearth if the weather were bleak, or the windows wide open to let in the scented summer air on balmy days; and the fragrant tea steaming on the daintily decorated table beside which they sat. And for the moment they were right so far as their own immediate surroundings were concerned,

these two good women, for where good women are, evil influences are suspended; and where good women work against them, evil influences are better than suspended, they are destroyed.

At the Castle during the winter there was little coming and going. The duke was understood to be occupied elsewhere with the duties of his position, and the duchess and Lady Ann were sunning themselves on the Riviera. There was something wrong with Lady Ann that winter. She was understood to be delicate, a fluctuating kind of delicacy which might have been traced to the movements of Algernon Pointz, so surely did it wane with his approach and wax in his absence.

At Pointz the family consistently pursued their one great object in life—keeping up appearances; trying to make it appear on insufficient means as if their wealth were as considerable as their greed of possession and exalted idea of their own importance would fain have had it. It cannot be said of the squire himself that he consciously worked for the great object. He never worked for anything. What he called work consisted in telling other people what to do, or rather in accepting their suggestions that certain things should be done by them for him. When Clutterbuck, his land agent, informed him that there was ploughing or sowing or reaping to be done, he would agree with a nod that it must be done, and afterwards, when the ploughing or sowing or reaping was going on, he would ride past the place, pull up his horse, look over the hedge, and watch with interest, for a little, the ploughing or sowing or reaping in progress. Thus he attended to what he was wont to describe as the onerous duties of a country gentleman.

Of late he had been somewhat troubled by the duke—not on his own account but on the duke's! The principles he prided himself upon were not to be shaken, but he began to fear for the duke's. There had been a suspicion of the taint of Radicalism in the flavour of some of his recent remarks. For the duke, since his visit to Adnam's Orchard, was all for coming into touch with the people. He had adopted the catch-word, "Help them to help themselves." Just exactly how this was to be done he had not had time to consider, but he meant to look into it, as he told the squire—whom he bothered now every time they met with the news that, "The right thing to

do at the present juncture, my dear Pointz, is for us to get into touch with the people, and help them to help themselves. Pay us all best in the long run, I assure you. Elevate the people without lowering ourselves, that's the thing to do." But the squire was mentally, morally, constitutionally, by tradition, education, and habit incapable of taking this view, or of understanding that any change could be a change for the better. "Keep the people in their place," was his catch-word, "their place" being to work for him for a bare living wage; he to order, they to obey; he to reap whatever they sowed—with the usual allowance, of course, of scanty pickings for the gleaners. Co-operation with the masses he conceived to be a dangerous proposition which no gentleman in his right mind could entertain for a moment; a levelling downwards which would trample in the mud every refinement of life; a lowering of the mountain to the plain which would involve the destruction of every influence that makes for beauty in the world. "The best life for man or woman," the squire decided, "is the life they have been bred to,"—a very comfortable doctrine for the man who has been bred to the best of everything. The squire spent much of his time chasing his opinions into the dark fastnesses of the wood which you cannot see because of the trees, whither they mostly led him; his object being to convert them into portable dogmas for general distribution, as a butcher converts sheep into mutton. And what with this pursuit and incessant attention to appearances, besides the effort necessary to nod his consent to the orders for the management of his property which Clutterbuck said that it was time for him to give, he had some right to consider himself a fully occupied member of the leisure class.

At the Rectory the impossible struggle with poverty, bad health, and its attendant miseries, persisted. Mrs. Blatchford sighed, suffered, and fought on, sustained by the mother-instinct to do till she died for her young, and by dreams of a golden future for Beryl the Beautiful. Mother and daughter alike found solace in such dreams, but with this wide difference, that the mother thought only of the girl, while the girl thought only of herself. When Beryl escaped to the region of Vain Imaginings, where she shone the centre of attraction, an object of envy and adoration to all beholders, she made no

provision for the mother, who was now her one adorer. She was to "get out of all this" with her fairy prince, her mother being included in "all this." In the delight of her imaginary future she grew more and more impatient of the humdrum present. The habit of doing ungraciously all that she had to do grew upon her, and not only marred her beauty for the moment, but was also defacing her character by forming a taste for unwholesome excitement as the one thing worth living for. Such flights of fancy as hers are mental dram-drinking of a poisonous kind; they render the victim insensible to every claim of natural affection, and confuse the mind so that right and wrong become indistinguishable, and there is finally no scruple as to the means by which the sensational dream-events they engender may be resolved into waking realities.

At Pratt's Place there was nothing but prosperity apparent, and Yeoman Pratt thanked his God every day of his life for the benefits vouchsafed to him and his. Adnam's enterprise prospered. His men were warmly housed in the corrugated iron safes the duke's bounty had enabled him to procure; his Orchard shone with glass, and already, from under the glass, profitable crops were being reaped for the market at Closterminster, which, however much it had, was always greedy for more.

But Adnam had lost some of his buoyancy. There was a change in him for which hard work and responsibility did not account. His spirit thrived on hard work and responsibility; these would never have worried him, and work without worry does not hurt. But he was not without worry. He had lost the first fine glow of adolescent confidence which, meeting obstacles only as they arise, is free of the torment of anxious anticipation. Seraph's weakness was on his mind, a load that weighed heavily since he had the constancy to bear it alone. Every night he sat up until Seraph was safe in bed—not that Seraph drank regularly. He had bouts of it; an intermittent craving; but as it was impossible to know when it might seize upon him and be indulged, Adnam felt it necessary to be always on guard, and the horror of what his father would suffer from the sense of disgrace if the truth should come to his knowledge, was always upon him.

Seraph soon knew that he had been found out. On waking one morning he had some faint recollection of Adnam in his room the night before, helping him to bed. He went to Adnam's room during the day, and found him at his writing-table. Adnam looked round: "Want me, Seraph?" he asked cheerfully.

Seraph eyed him with suspicion: "Were you in my room last night, or did I dream it?" he demanded, scowling.

"I was in your room," Adnam answered.

Seraph waited. "Well——?" he ejaculated finally, when it became evident that Adnam was not going to speak.

Adnam hesitated. "You're too good for that sort of thing, Seraph," he said at last, throwing down his pen.

Seraph would have understood a jibe and been ready to retort, but he was unprepared for this attitude, although it was always Adnam's attitude; the effect of his breeding appearing in the considerate restraint of his manners. The friendliness, the sympathy, the allowance made for human peccability, even the recognition of and respect for his own good qualities, which he detected in Adnam's speech, only roused Seraph's resentment. The bad blood in him was ungenerous, as bad blood always is, and betrayed him, as bad blood always does, into taking and giving offence where a worse man with finer feelings would have been moved at least to parley amicably.

"I suppose you'll peach!" he jeered.

"You do not suppose so," Adnam answered decidedly. He gave Seraph one steady look, compressed his lips, and returned to his writing.

Seraph left him with rage and hate in his heart. He determined in future to lock his door, but when he went to bed, he found that lock and bolt had been removed, and he knew that it would be useless to replace them. Adnam had forestalled him and would again; he thought of everything; and Seraph dared not complain. Complaint would surely have provoked inquiries. For the present there was nothing for it but to elude, while appearing to submit to, Adnam's vigilance; but Seraph vowed vengeance in the future on the first chance that should offer of making it exemplary.

At Red Rose Farm Ella toiled and taught and learnt, and

learnt and taught and toiled, steady as time to her purpose, equable always on the surface, concealing her thoughts. Robert was living at Adnam's Orchard now, but he did not neglect his duties as self-constituted guardian of his sister. He came and went and—with his rustic speech, his innate refinement and delicacy of feeling, which made it impossible that he should offend the most fastidious taste; his perfect integrity bred of the pure practice of *noblesse oblige*, that integrity without which no man should flatter himself that he is a gentleman—he was the one prop and stay upon which Ella would have relied whole-heartedly had she ever relied upon anybody but herself.

Luke also had left the house, but Ella was on friendlier terms with him now than she had been before. A good understanding had been gradually growing up between them ever since that evening when, as they came away together from the Ryecotes' Cot in the wood, he had made her aware of a better self in him for which she had given him no credit. As he walked away from her, a poor, shabby, lonesome creature, depressed and hopeless, she was moved to pity, and she blamed herself. To see nothing but good in people is to be silly; to see no good in them is to be depraved; to be perfectly sane we must be able to see both the good and the bad, appreciate the one and account for the other; so may we find the right remedy and apply it. The right remedy is not in contempt for and condemnation of the bad, but in appreciation and approval of the good. The moment when Ella softened at a glimpse of a better self in Luke was the turning-point in his career, and he had been doing well for himself ever since, thanks to an event which gave him a chance to turn over a new leaf whilst the mood was on him.

The chance came of a crisis at the Brabant Arms. After many threats, Leonard Pettiblock finally struck. He made up his mind one night, packed his belongings, and came down next morning dressed for a journey and carrying his bag.

Adam Hurst looked up from his newspapers when Pettiblock entered the parlour with his hat on and his travelling bag in his hand.

"Wherever are you going so early, Len?" Adam asked,

in the cordial tone he habitually affected when speaking to his useful nephew.

"I'm off out of this," Leonard answered bluntly.

This was a shock to Adam, but he had his man-servant mask on his face in a moment to hide the effect. "Not feeling the thing?" he said sympathetically. "I've noticed you've been a bit off colour of late. You've made up your mind sudden, and you've a right of it. You'll be the better of a change, and I hope you'll have a good time. But don't stay long away from your old uncle, Len, dear boy. I miss you sadly, if it's only for a day you go. I'm failing fast."

"You'll miss me, I know," Leonard answered sardonically; "but as to failing, you're in the prime of life. What's fifty or sixty to an idle man as doesn't use himself up other ways? You've got an eye to the maids still, you and your duke. I've seen you."

The silk tassel on Adam's smoking-cap vibrated to an inward chuckle at this: "Now, have you?" he said, smiling admiringly. "You always was a sharp one!"

"Was I? Well, it's time I did something for myself with my sharpness, so I'm off."

"Have you breakfasted, Len?" his uncle asked considerately.

"As usual," Leonard rejoined, "in the kitchen, on what I could get while the cook was preparing your grace's dainty meal."

Hurst affected to laugh indulgently: "You always was funny, Len," he said. "Your pore dear aunt always said so. It's a great gift to be funny. Now, I never was. We're gifted for what we've got to do. Gravity was my gift. If I'd ever lost my gravity I'd have lost my place. But your place is here, Len, you're an entertainer. When the old house is yours, as yours it will be, and you stand in my shoes, you'll stand well, because you have the gift."

"Blarney!" said Pettiblock. "Your shoes'll not be wore out by the time I come into 'em, that's sure; you'll never use 'em enough for that! It's me that'll be wore out if I'm fool enough to wait here fur 'em. But I'm not going to wait. I'm off. So long!"

With a gesture, as of farewell, he turned to depart.

"Len, dear boy!" Hurst exclaimed piteously, half rising, with the newspaper held in both hands spread out over him like an apron, and the tassel wagging at the side of his head in great agitation, "you don't mean it! You wouldn't desert your uncle! Remember your pore dear aunt's last words, 'You'll do your duty by uncle as long as you live, Len?'"

"I am doing my duty by uncle," Len answered doggedly. "I'm going away to give you a chance. You'll lose your immortal soul if I stay here to let you put upon me any more."

Hurst said not another word, but he played a master-stroke. He dropped into his chair, bowed his grey head, and burst into tears.

Pettiblock hesitated. The Brabant Arms had been his home as long as he could remember anything. He had a genuine affection for his uncle, and for the house, in the welfare of which he took a pride. He saw the old man deserted and lonesome without a soul to rely upon; the house going to rack and ruin, the business slipping away. His irritation changed to pity. He felt for himself, too, out in the world alone, probably among the unemployed. After all, what were his prospects away out there in the vague?

The tassel had fallen forward and was wagging pathetically over the wrinkled hand with which Adam was holding his handkerchief to his face. Like all weak, sentimental selfish men, he had tears at command, and Pettiblock was not unaccustomed to them, yet they never failed of their effect.

"It's yer own fault," he said at last sullenly; but there was indecision in his voice, and his uncle was quick to take advantage of it.

"I've tried to be a father to you, Len," he said, shaking the tassel back with a jerk of his head, and wiping his eyes. "But maybe, not being a father in my own right, so to speak, I've failed. For anything you have against me, Len, I beg your pardon. And I give you my blessing freely, if you will go. The world's a cold place, a lone place to be out in alone, and this will be a cold place and a lone place for me when you desert me. But I give you my blessing. And not my blessing only. There's a trifle of money I can let you have, if you'll ac-

cept it. My mind would be the easier if I knew you had it. My heart will go with you, Len, dear boy, and it would hurt me sore to think that you might be destitute, you as I've never let know what want is."

A long silence ensued, during which Hurst wiped his eyes and sniffed, and sniffed and wiped his eyes again, like one who would control his grief if he could; and Pettiblock, watching him, softened more and more.

"If you won't work yourself, and won't get me help, I'd best go," he said at last.

"Help?"—this was a new idea to Adam—"whatever help can I get you? It's not every man can help in a business like ours."

"There's Luke Banks—just the man. He can talk——"

"A lot of dam' rot," Hurst interrupted, recovering himself, and hopefully putting his handkerchief into his pocket.

"It's what folks like," Pettiblock would have it. "It's new rot, and worth a sight on that account."

"I don't know," Hurst argued shrewdly. "The dam' rot people like is their own dam' rot, the sort they've been used to all their lives."

"And that's what they'll get from Luke," Pettiblock asserted. "But he'll go one better for them than they can go for themselves. They don't know life as they live it for the rot it is. They only feel it's hard and no way out. Luke'll put it into words for 'em, and he'll give 'em something to catch on to. That's what they want, a rope——"

"To hang themselves——"

"A rope they can catch a good hold of to pull themselves up by out of the mire."

"You think folks'll come to listen to Luke Banks? Why, look at him! He's no better than a tramp!"

"That's just the mistake you make," Pettiblock rejoined. "There's no tramp in Luke. A tramp's got no opinion of himself. The trouble wi' Luke is too much opinion of himself. What makes him mad is not being set high enough fur folks to have to look up at him. He'll talk different when he gets summat to do that suits him, an' this 'ere business is just the very thing for Luke. Being behind a bar gives a man a purchase on folks' attention, and puts a polish on him. He's got to

serve them, and that's discipline fur 'im; and they get to expecting something worth having from him; their beer to begin with; and then any news he may have to give them by way of discount. To be a barman worth yer salt you've got to have the gift of the gab, and Luke's got it. That's his gift, what you was talking about just now."

"Maybe so," said Hurst, rapidly making up his mind to give Luke a trial as the lesser of two evils. "You'll keep the accounts?" he stipulated. "You'll stay head yourself, master—master under me, of course." He drew himself up to emphasise this indication that he did not intend to abdicate.

"I'll do as I always have done so far as carryin' on the business goes," Pettiblock doggedly assured him; "but I'll not do everything any more; so I give you fair warning, uncle; take it or leave it."

"I accept your offer, Len, I accept your offer," Hurst replied graciously, like one conferring a favour, but deprecating thanks. At the same time he nodded his head to give the concession the air of having been brought about by mature consideration. When he did come to reflect upon it, the prospect pleased him. He saw before him long happy mornings in the sun undisturbed; long afternoons free for a siesta; long evenings for the enjoyment of social intercourse, untroubled by the sense of responsibility, untroubled by its exactions. Servants have the power with which chameleons are credited; they take on the colour of their surroundings, not the actual but the moral colour—the manners, the habits of their employers. Households have each a distinct character of their own, this one happy-go-lucky, that one exacting, uncertain; another well-ordered, securc. It was said of the Brabants that they none of them had any side on; neither had Adam Hurst. His demeanour was diffident, considerate. He gave himself no more airs than the duke, therefore he was popular; and he doted on popularity. To be able to play the grand old game of inn-keeper without doing the work, to entertain just as the duke entertained, without having to worry about details, everything arranged for him, nothing required of him but to be pleasant—that was Adam's idea of perfect bliss; and now that, for the first time, the chance of realising his idea was offered to him, naturally he jumped at it.

Pettiblock put down his bag: "I'll go and find Luke," he said.

"Won't you take your bag upstairs?" his uncle asked insinuatingly.

"No, I won't," Pettiblock answered. "I'll want it, maybe. If Luke won't come, I'll want it."

The vision of ducal ease, so soothing to Adam Hurst, was suddenly obscured by this threat, but Adam clung to it: "You'll get some one else, Len, dear boy," he said anxiously. "You'll surely get some one else?"

Leonard grunted something and went out. The battle had ended satisfactorily for both of them, but the nephew knew better than to run the risk of what might happen if he let his uncle make too sure of him.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was not until the autumn of the second year of his enterprise that Adnam made any considerable change in his staff. When it became necessary, the company at the Brabant Arms was pleasantly excited by the news. What would become of the men who were to be dismissed? Old Ryecote, being as secure from want in his own berth as the duke was up at the Castle, and being quite as unable as the duke himself to imagine any state of things in general that could be better than the state which had answered so well in his own case, viewed the matter with comfortable aloofness. If the men had to go they had to go, and what happened to them would be their own lookout. Lack of imagination, without which sympathetic insight is impossible, may be a great saving of suffering to the individual, but to the community at large it is a curse that has for effect the perpetuation of every other kind of curse that makes for misery.

Corporal George Locke and Robert Banks were at the Brabant Arms one evening when the talk turned upon the dismissals. The two men were generally respected, and having much in common they had chummed. Both were troubled for the future of their mates, and both, being practical men, were

giving their minds to the subject with a view to some practical result.

"If good men are let go begging from hereabouts, where God knows there's enough to be done and few good men to do it, it'll be a disgrace to the countryside," Robert Banks declared with emphasis.

"Will I fill your mug, Mr. Robert?" Luke asked with exaggerated deference, a piece of facetiousness regularly repeated when his brother was there, and as regularly received with a loud guffaw as humour of the finest.

"Well, I don't know about good men," said Farmer Hallbin, resuming the subject when this parenthesis was over. "I'd be chary about taking of 'em on myself after the cossetting they've had up at Pratt's Place, wot wi' them swarries and fallals. Good men were not got that way in my young days, and I'll never believe it's the way to get good men now."

"I thought the question just now was how to get men of any kind, good or bad, on to this here deserted land," said Corporal Locke. "Our Christian governors don't hold out no inducement to get men to stay on the land. They love their Colonial neighbours so much better than themselves that they're sending 'em out the pick of our lads. What'll be left to defend this country, if it ever comes to defending it, God only knows. You can't get a recruitie now wi' the making of a full-sized soldier in 'im, not fur love or money. The emigration agent has something worth offering to the likely lads, and he has it all his own way with them. The recruiting sergeant 'asn't a chance. There's nothing left fur 'im but the weeds. These boys with some eddication knows that there's more in life worth having than bands of music and beer and the girls agog when there's uniforms about. They know a man can't live on sweetmeats, 'twouldn't be wholesome; and them things is nothing but sweetmeats. Nor there isn't anything to catch 'em now even by the eye. Your finest young cock in karki looks no better than a cock that's just moulted."

These sentiments, delivered with great deliberation between puffs at a pipe, were received with questioning eyeings of the speaker and ambiguous grunts. The company, having no opinion to express on opinions so entirely new to them, smoked on reflectively for a little; then Luke remarked sententiously,

by way of giving the conversational ball a kick to set it going again: "Times are changing."

"Ay, you're right, Luke, for once," his father agreed, "and the sign of it to me is the way the labourers hereabouts has took the doings up to Pratt's Place. In my young days, if a lot o' foreigners, as you might say, 'ad bin brought in like that and set above 'em all, in a manner o' speaking, wi' swarries and fallals, fishin', an' skylarkin', and picnicking, more like a lot o' gentlemen playing about than working men, the labourers would 'ev bin up wi' pitchforks and 'ad 'em out o' this sharp."

"Us would," said old Ryecote, with a knowing nod. "I can't make 'em out nowadays, lying so low. Young fellows was different i' my time."

"It's easy enough to make 'em out," Luke explained. "In your younger days there was men in plenty on the land as belonged to it, and the land belonged to them, so to speak, and their fathers before them; landlords and tenants and labourers, each in their own place, they'd always been there, and they were content so long as each was left in his own place, with his own rightful bones to gnaw. If any strange dog had come smellin' after those bones, they'd have hounded him out, as you say, Mr. Ryecote. There was enough of them then to do it, and since there wasn't enough of 'em they've felt secure, *because* there wasn't enough, and they thought men couldn't be got. But now Adnam Pratt's showed that men could be got for the asking, they've not felt secure. They knew if there was any grumbling they'd lose their billets as like as not; that's why they've laid low."

Again the company smoked reflectively for a little; then Ellery Banks broke the silence once more: "I don't know as I can agree with you, neighbour Hallbin," he said, taking up the previous question, and speaking in the formal deprecating tone which it had become customary at the Brabant Arms to assume in imitation of Adam Hurst's ducal manners, in order to avert offensive proceedings when there was a difference of opinion between two speakers. "Times is changed and young men is changed, as the corporal says; and I'll not say myself whether for better or worse. But what I do say is that you'll not keep young men 'ereabouts nowadays, nor old ones neither as has once broken away, without some diversion. In our young

days men lived on the land as the cattle lived, just because they found themselves there. They didn't know there was any other way of living. They was always told as Providence put them there, and they was to thank Providence fur not putting of 'em into a worse place. They'd some idee that there was worse places because they was always bein' told so. That kept them quiet until they began learning to read and to look about 'em a bit. No wonder the gentry fought against eddication! They knowed what eddication meant. It meant no more of yer old Providence fur the labourer, just as it 'ad meant no more o' yer old Providence for 'emselves. When the labourer began to read he learnt that a man can be his own Providence. The gentry had never stayed where they was. They went about and they 'elped themselves. They got there first wherever it was, and 'ad the pick of everything; and a labourer 'ere and there gets up and thinks 'e'll go there too, and 'ev a try for somethin' 'imself. And once 'e gets away 'e doesn't come back—or 'e doesn't come back to stay. He knows better. He knows now there's more to life than just eating, drinking, and sleeping, when 'e isn't working. That's why you'll not keep men 'ere. Whilst they're at work they're content to be machines, but onest the work's done, they'll want to be men—men in their own way. They'll want to play. They know now that play was included in the lot of man; they see play's been good for the classes, and they nat'rally infer that it would be good for the masses too. And what is there for them to play at or to play with in places like this 'ere Castlefield Saye? Just drink at the public 'ouse!"

Luke struck an attitude: "Was that the melodious voice of my respected parent?" he asked dramatically, to the great delight of the company.

"Shut up, Luke, you fool," his father retorted goodhumouredly. "It's only what you've been saying yourself ever since you came back. But you said it so nasty——"

Luke cast up his eyes sanctimoniously: "Alas!" he interrupted, "he'll never be the man his father was!"

"—I paid no attention. 'Twas the way you said it struck me allus at the time," old Ellery went on stolidly. "But I've been seein' fur meself of late."

"With the help of that other little boy of yours, Master

Robert, I'll lay," Pettiblock observed. "Master Robert 'e 'as the pleasantest way with 'im!"

The company exploded at this, and pipes were waved towards Robert in approval. Robert deprecated this public attention by turning his back.

"You speak true, Mr. Banks," Corporal Locke observed. "And our Young Shaver knew as much though without know-in' anything. But 'ow 'e got there without your age and experience is a mystery."

"'Young Shaver' was what the men in camp called Master Adnam," Luke explained. The information was received with knowing nods, as an item that not only gave the company an insight into the ways of the camp, but was also a valuable addition to their knowledge of life. "And I can tell you what that sort of thing is called," Luke added. "I mean the knowing without knowing. It is called Genius."

"Is Genius another name for your mother?" a quiet voice asked ironically.

The startled company turned to the speaker, and discovered Mickleham, standing with his back to the oak screen, in front of the door. He looked as if he had been there all the time, but nobody had noticed him. This did not strike the majority, to whom he was unknown, as strange; but Robert Banks and the Corporal exchanged significant glances, and Luke's fatuously smiling, self-satisfied countenance became curiously overcast. He looked apprehensive.

Adam Hurst, who was sitting with his back to the screen, at some distance from it, when Mickleham spoke, rose hurriedly, with surprise on his face; but at a glance direct from Mickleham, the man-servant mask descended, and instantly blotted out all expression. He remained standing, however.

Mickleham, looking at the Corporal and Robert Banks, addressed them as if he were continuing a conversation: "How would it be to send a deputation to the squire?" he said. He might be persuaded to keep the men on his property. There is need enough for men at Pointz. Suggest co-operation."

Robert and the Corporal consulted each other with their eyes, each waiting for the other to reply. The exchange of glances seemed to be momentary, but when they looked towards

the screen again, Mickleham had gone, and Adam Hurst was wiping his forehead as if he were over-heated.

"The devil!" the Corporal ejaculated under his breath.

"I sometimes think so," Robert whispered.

"Who is that gentleman?" Hallbin asked.

"Gentleman!" Luke echoed derisively. "Why, he's just an ordinary workman."

"One of our men," the Corporal said soberly.

"Indeed!" Adam Hurst commented, raising his eyebrows and pinching his chin. "I wonder what he is doing—that 'gentleman'—in your gallery, as the duke used to say."

"Why, do you know him?" Robert asked, with a keen glance from under his black brows.

Adam shrugged his shoulders. "I seem to have seen him somewhere," he answered vaguely, as if trying to recollect.

"You've seen a many men in your time, Mr. Hurst," Farmer Hallbin opined, comfortably. "So 'ave I. An' you can't always place 'em. Nor can you always tell by the look of a man what 'e is. I've seen a gentleman born as like a groom as any brought up in a stable. You couldn't 'ave told one from another not till 'e spoke. But there yo 'ad 'im. It's in the voice."

"You've got it, Mr. Hallbin," Adam answered. "There's no mistaking the voice. The gentry have a way of speaking no workman could ever get round. There was a prince, a friend of his grace's we used to visit at his castle in foreign parts, a queer-looking little chap—common, that's the one word for his appearance—but when he spoke, why, there you had him!"

Pipes had been suspended and mouths opened, the better to hear what Adam was saying. When he stopped, the pipes were resumed, and the conversation turned off easily on the trail of this red herring.

But old Rycote was not to be diverted. "Wot may 'co-operation' be?" he asked in the first pause.

"What may co-operation be?" Adam Hurst repeated, slowly, to gain time. "It depends. Co-operation is one of those things which it is easier to understand than to explain."

Rycote pulled at his pipe and waited expectantly.

"Eh," said Farmer Hallbin, "there's a power of things of that kind going on in the world."

The company took his observation into consideration, and smoked silently upon it, with the exception of Robert and the Corporal, who conversed together in low tones.

At length the Corporal said, addressing the company generally: "If we was to send a deppitation to the squire on behalf of the men, we'd want a spokesman as knowed where he was and what was what."

"There's yer spokesman ready made!" said Pettiblock, pointing to Luke. "Luke knows the lie of the land, so to speak, and could put it plain to the squire."

"Put *wot* plain to the squire?" old Ryecote demanded, impatient of all this vagueness.

"Tell 'im, Luke," said Pettiblock.

Luke, swelling with importance, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and prepared to orate. To be listened to with respect, to be called upon to speak as one who knows, had been the dream of his life; but, unfortunately, as with dreamers in general, the call, when it came, found him at fault for want of material. He had imagined the moment often enough—imagined himself high placed above the multitude, looking down into their upturned faces, deafened by their ringing cheers, thanking them for their confidence in him; but the means by which he was to win to this proud elevation he had never rehearsed. It was sufficient for the dream that he had made his mark, that he had moved the masses with a great speech about their rights and their wrongs. Never a detail was clear in his mind. Every part of the picture was blurred up to the moment when the shouts broke forth which proclaimed him a leader of men. But from that point all was clear. With his hand on his heart, he saw himself bowing, and in proud humility he framed suitable acknowledgments of the generous reception which had been accorded to his poor efforts.

"Put it to 'em plain, Luke," Pettiblock urged, not without malice, seeing him at a loss. But that was just what Luke could not do. He had not one clear thought, one positive principle ready to express. He had been fluent enough while the chronic irritation set up by his own first failure in life was upon him, urging him to the use of a farrago of general abuse for relief; but he had not even that to fall back upon now. Comfortable and congenial circumstances had cured him of

his chronic irritation. His recollection of Hyde Park was blurred. Having no longer anything to complain of personally, he no longer felt that everything was all wrong with everybody. Your demagogue is apt to become an optimist so soon as he is satisfied with his own position; he tells people that the hardships he no longer feels are inevitable and must be endured; and he becomes distinguished by the patience with which he endures the troubles from which he no longer suffers. With his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, Luke stood before the company now, groping among his whirling thoughts for something "to put to 'em plain," for an opening, for a text: "Downtrodden as we are—" he stammered.

"Speak for yourself!" Farmer Hallbin interrupted jovially. "Who's downtrodden?"

"Ay!" came from the company collectively, with a shout of laughter. "Who's downtrodden?"

The blood mounted to Luke's head. His eyes became congested in an effort to collect himself.

"Try co-operation," Pettiblock suggested.

"Co-operation—" Luke repeated desperately, "you'll find it in the dictionary. It is as you may say—Mr. Hurst, you've got it!"

"Co-operation," said Robert Banks, rising as he spoke, "is when one man joins with another to do the best they can for themselves. You'd better attend to that tap, Luke. It's dripping. Good-night, gentlemen all."

He passed out, with Corporal Locke in his wake. The eyes of the company followed them, and Luke, finding himself released from their attention, turned to the tap. "It's gone wrong," he muttered.

"Call in the plumber," said Pettiblock. "You'll not get it right without his co-operation."

The repetition of a word, acting on the collective mind of a vulgar assembly, is apt to provoke laughter. The Brabant Arms resounded with laughter now, and "co-operation" became a popular catchword, full of meaning, yet lacking in significance to the popular intelligence, in the village from this time forth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ONE afternoon this autumn Lena went out alone with two objects in view. She was bent on a solitary ramble, and also she wanted to gossip. For the gossip she was going to the Ryecote's Cot, and that was to be the end of her solitary ramble. Leaving the Castle grounds she followed a sheep-path on the steep bare side of the hill, facing the sea. Among her many pursuits she managed to secure for herself intervals of solitude, not because she wanted to think, but because she loved to feel—to feel alive. Our finest sensations resent the intrusion of thought. When thought is suspended, we mount, we fly, we are with the gods on Olympus; when thought returns we fall. We know ourselves for wingless creatures crawling on the earth. Oneness with nature does not come of thought but of feeling; to be aware of the sea as a sensation is to know the sea beyond anything that mortal mind can reveal. There are two kinds of ecstasy; the ecstasy of the flesh, when every sense, healthy and alert, thrills to the influence that has the power to play upon it pleasurably; and the rarer ecstasy of the soul that can shed its body and fare forth, far on the borders of the arcane, unencumbered. The perfectly balanced human being is capable of both.

It was in the vibration of her healthy senses that Lena revelled that day—in the beauty that met her eye; in the sounds that filled her ears, in the scents she inhaled with delight, in the tender, invigorating touch of the sea-breeze that met her fitfully and caressed her. It was a radiant afternoon. The sky was intensely blue, where it could be seen between the dazzling white mountainous clouds which were sailing lazily overhead, or hanging low above the iridescent smoothness of the sea. The sheep-path was little more than a ledge on the precipitous side of the hill, but Lena followed it as unconcernedly as the sheep themselves. Neither giddiness nor thought of danger troubled her. She was interested in everything about her, from the great white clouds above, to the tiny bright yellow flowers upspringing from the grey-green grass, nibbled so close by the sheep. Now she stood to feel her face

fanned by the sea-breeze, now she stooped to rob a root of sea-pink of its last lingering blossom. As she fixed the flower in her waistbelt she glanced up at the Castle. Only one window could be seen from where she stood, the corner window of the duke's room. It seemed to be peeping over the trees like a wicked old eye, looking askance at the Coastguard's Death.

It was a long way round by the hillside to her destination, which was not in sight of the sea, but she came out eventually on the direct road, and made for the Cot in the clearing. She had rambled alone long enough for the moment, and was ready for some new diversion. The new diversion was already on the road, in the shape of a man, following her. She heard his step, and turned to see who it was.

"Luke Banks?" she said.

"Yes, Miss Kedlock," Luke answered, taking off his hat.

She raised her eyebrows in some displeasure. Luke should have touched his hat, and said "Miss." However, she saw reason to be glad of these two indications of how Luke stood in his own estimation. You must know a man from his own point of view in order to deal with him successfully, and a glimpse was enough for Lena. High or low, old or young, it did not matter to her, she had to capture them all, and nature had armed her for the sport with uncanny insight, of all her weapons the most reliable.

They were in the wood now, on a path which led only to the Cot in the clearing, so, obviously, they must go in the same direction. Luke was embarrassed. He did not like to pass Miss Kedlock, and it would be a liberty to walk beside her. He compromised by keeping on the grass, a little behind. From this point of view he could look at her without offence, since she could only see him by turning her head, and he gazed his fill in delight.

Lena had improved since she came to the Castle. She was eighteen now, and very slender, but no longer thin. Luke's first impression was of freshness and fair hair, brightly burnished, and somewhat ruffled by the breeze. Then, in contrast, the black lines of her eyebrows claimed his attention, and her dark eyes. Uncommon, the black eyes with such fair hair! She glanced at him and the eyes glinted sapphire blue. Luke was strangely stirred by this revelation of their colour. But

it was her freshness that held him, the freshness of everything she wore, the transparent delicacy of her complexion; it was even in her manner, her voice—freshness and strength. He could not have described her, yet every detail of her appearance remained in his mind—the carmine of her lips, the small, even, milk-white teeth, her perfect hands and feet; and it was in detail that he recollected her. When he tried to think of her whole appearance he glowed with enthusiasm, but he was dazzled, and saw her only as in a mist—because he was a man.

“Going to see your sweetheart?” she asked after a pause, with another glint of sapphire in her glance. Luke’s countenance clouded, and, seeing this, she remembered that sweethearts are for farm hands and corrected herself—“your young lady?”

Luke beamed. “I don’t flatter myself I have a young lady as yet, Miss Kedlock,” he answered genteelly.

“Oh, yes, you have, right enough,” she said. “Or you can have for the asking. A smart young man like you—I should think so!”

A smile brought the carmine lips into play with the milk-white teeth between, and Luke succumbed. For the first time in his life he felt that the highest duty of man was to serve. She had captured him so thoroughly that he envied the privileged being who held her little shoes in his hand and cleaned them.

They were seen from the Cot as they approached, and Mrs. Rycote and Alice came to the door to receive them. There were smiles and cordial greetings and inquiries after each individual member of The Family, and a chair for Miss Lena. Luke stood in the background.

“And how is Emily doing, miss?” the mother asked, but not until every other duty of the occasion had been carefully performed.

“I don’t know—why do you ask me?” Lena replied, surprised by the question.

“Didn’t you know she was at the Castle, miss?” the good woman commented. “But the Castle is big enough, surely, for you not to know who is or who isn’t there!”

“If Emily were at the Castle I should know it,” Lena an-

swered, with a catch in her breath. "But she is not there. What made you think that she was?"

"Surely she is there, miss," the mother insisted. "Since Monday—four days."

They were all smiling still, but mechanically. Lena stared at Mrs. Ryecote, and turned pale.

The good woman rose from her seat hurriedly: "You are not well, miss!"

Lena brushed her hands over her eyes, as if to clear away something unpleasant, and in the act she recovered herself.

"Mrs. Ryecote," she said, very gently, but firmly, "Emily is not at the Castle."

She transferred the suspicion which had caused her sudden emotion to Alice with a glance when she had spoken, and Alice also turned pale: "Emily told us she was going to help the sewing-maid," she explained, controlling her voice with difficulty. "We were glad. We thought she'd like it better than the lace-making."

She looked at Lena piteously as she spoke, and then at her mother, who stood clasping and unclasping her hands nervously; but she was not frightened as yet, only bewildered.

Luke came forward. "If Emily is not at the Castle," he said, "where is she?"

Mrs. Ryecote opened her mouth to speak, but no words came. She dropped into a chair.

"We must find her," said Lena, speaking to Luke.

He took up his hat.

The little group, a few minutes ago so happy and smiling, looked now like people upon whom the news of some unexpected calamity had fallen suddenly; too stunned to think. Words and tears failed them. The mother rocked herself in her chair, Alice was frowning as if in pain, Lena and Luke suffered in sympathy.

"We must find her," Lena repeated.

"She's at the Castle," Mrs. Ryecote burst out at last. "Give me my bonnet, Alice. I'll go and see for myself."

"Yes, do," Lena urged, seeing that to do something was the only relief. "Alice, go with her. Dear Mammy Ryecote"—she put her arm round the poor woman's neck and kissed

her—"don't be alarmed. It will be all right." A bright idea struck her: "Perhaps the White Witch—perhaps she's with Ella Banks."

She looked at Luke. "It's likely," he said, returning the look. Each knew that the other did not think so.

They left the cottage together, the mother, heedless of everything but her object, her bonnet on one side, her dress in disorder, running, stumbling, gasping, becoming more alarmed as she proceeded, yet all the time protesting that of course she was at the Castle, where else could she be? Alice supported her and did her best to calm her, Luke and Lena dropped behind.

"What do you think, Miss Kedlock?" Luke asked.

"Have you ever seen her about with any one?"

Luke saw the suggestion. "I thought so," he answered. "I saw you had that in your mind, Miss Kedlock. Yes, I have. I've seen her in the fields——"

Lena stopped him. "No names," she said. "The question is, what to do first?"

"Break it to my brother Robert, Miss Kedlock, I think."

"Break *what*?" Lena snapped, her tone betraying the irritation of her jarred nerves.

"If she's not at the Castle, where is she?"

Repeating the mother's words in another tone, Luke said all that could be said at present.

Lena was silent for a little. They were hurrying up to the Castle.

"We must get a trap and drive," she said at last. "Where shall we go first?" There was excitement in this episode, and she meant to see the thing through.

"I must go to Robert," he answered. "He's at Pratt's Place. Perhaps you know, Miss Kedlock? she was engaged to him."

Lena knew.

At the Castle they procured a dog-cart, and set off, Lena driving, Luke sitting beside her, a young groom behind. Old Brown had protested that it was his place to accompany her.

"Whatever are you up to now, miss?" he demanded, looking suspiciously at Luke.

"We're trying to be up to the devil," she answered, "and

only light weights are eligible for hunting him, so you can't come, Brownie."

"Is there anything really wrong, miss?" the old servant asked seriously.

"I'm afraid there is," she answered. "At least, it looks like a girl gone wrong, if you call that anything," she flung back at him as she drove out of the yard, and left him looking relieved.

It so happened that all the gossips in the neighbourhood saw Miss Kedlock that afternoon "driving Luke Banks about the country," and never forgot to mention the circumstance when her conduct was the subject of animadversion. But little she recked. Her whole soul was bent on the exciting business in hand. Regardless in her excitement of what the groom might overhear, she questioned Luke closely about Robert—what would he say to him? how would he take it?

"He'll be cut to the heart, Miss Kedlock," Luke solemnly asseverated.

"Oh, Luke!" she exclaimed. "Let me be there! I want to see!"

"It's very kind of you, very, Miss Kedlock," Luke was sure. "But it'll be a sore sight."

"I must be there," she reiterated. "I've never yet seen a man cut to the heart."

She never wanted to see another. She was too emotional not to suffer acutely when she saw others suffering, and the scene with Robert, short as it was, haunted her for many a long day. Robert, sore stricken at first with fears for Emily's safety; Robert, bewildered by the suggestion of duplicity on her part; Robert, seeing reason to suspect her; then the inevitable outbreak of ungovernable rage, almost instantly suppressed; the discipline, the self-restraint of the strong man; and the effect of the torture, the terrible change wrought in a few minutes, the look that came into the dark, handsome, earnest face, and rested there when at last he felt the full force of the blow. And his simple words: "We must find her and bring her back, Luke, wherever she be. You'll excuse us going off at once, miss? And thank you kindly."

Lena, left to herself, and impatient of the pain of it all, began to look about her in search of some new distraction by

way of antidote. She was in Adnam's Orchard, but she did not want Adnam. She was not in the right mood to play with him. It was Saturday afternoon, there was no one at work, and the Orchard seemed quite deserted.

At the far end of it, however, by the brook, with his hands clasped behind his head to raise it, Fusty Ginger was lying on his back on some planks, looking up. The clouds had dispersed at sunset, the sky was clear, and in the immeasurable height above him, he seemed to see something that filled him with joy, for his countenance shone. But it was not his eyes that saw. The vision by which he was irradiated was in his soul. One night lately, Mickleham had found him alone, lying his length like this, looking up at the stars, and had spoken, or so it seemed to Fusty, for it might have been all a dream born of the previous occasion, when, with a few words of power, the strange little man had stirred him as he had never before been stirred. At all events, as in a dream, it seemed natural that Mickleham should come and speak and go again unquestioned, like the wayward wind which stays for a moment to fan a spark, and goes again unquestioned though the spark has been fanned to a flame. "I don't know what religion you profess," Mickleham had said, "and it doesn't matter. What I do know is that you cannot lie there under those vast skies, you cannot look up on a night like this at the wonder of the heavens, you cannot think of moon and stars journeying their appointed way, of the seasons falling in due course, of the astounding miracle wrought in the tiny seed which is now that mighty forest tree, that beautiful beech there, across the brook—you cannot think of these wonders, you cannot feel them without realising that behind them all there is Something worshipful, Something to revere and to thank. Man, believe me, in the act of worship, if only you give your heart to it in love and praise, is the highest, the most lasting delight that we poor mortals can feel on the earth. I have come to-night to call you to this great joy at the close of this your day—your little day. Praise be——"

"Praise be!" came from Fusty's heart to his lips, and had been singing there ever since.

Lena, wandering about the Orchard, found him lying by the brook, and stopped. He looked up at her with a singularly

happy face; but there was something in the expression of it that made her heart contract.

"You are ill?" she said.

Remembering his manners, he got up: "Excuse me, miss," he answered. "I wasn't thinking. No, I'm not ill, thank you."

"What is your name?" she asked.

He tried to remember. "I'm blessed if I can tell you," he said, addressing the country at large in the effort to recall it. It was the name he had given when he came to the camp, which was not his own, that escaped him now. "But they call me Fusty Ginger, on account of my hambrosial locks."

He ruffled his hair with both hands and grinned.

"If you were ill what would you do?" she asked.

Fusty had no answer ready to this conundrum. He thought it out. "If I was in London," he said at last, "I'd go to the 'orspital."

Lena nodded. "I hope you won't be ill," she said.

"Thank you, miss." He looked at her attentively, but was thinking of something else. "Who knows?" he added, smiling as at a pleasant prospect.

Lena, driving back to the Castle in the still of the evening became obsessed by a phrase. It shaped itself rhythmically to the beat of her horse's hoofs: "There is death in that man's face."

The Power-there-is-no-gainsaying had taken the duke at his word of late, and was forcing him to "look into things" to which he would not otherwise have paid special attention. Lena was the instrument chosen on several occasions for this purpose. The duke, be it remembered, was fond of girls and they all loved him. He was the chosen confidant of many girls in society, who would consult him in their difficulties and pour out their inmost thoughts to him with unpremeditated sincerity; and he never failed them. In so far as he could understand and help he did, with a wise discretion; and many a girl had reason to be thankful that she had trusted to his judgment at a crisis and shaped her future by his advice. A commonplace man in the affairs of life generally, he had attained without intention to a unique position in this respect and was quite unaware of it. The secret of his attraction remained a secret

even to himself. Many attributes, all those, in fact, which are essentially the attributes of a gentleman, must have been concerned in it; not the least being the honesty of his liking, his perfectly scrupulous disinterestedness. There were occasions in his past when he appears to have been inconsistent in this, but he was not really so, for on such occasions these qualities had not been expected of him. It was in the matter of what was expected of him that he showed his consistency; he answered to expectation as a ship to its rudder, and a man in his position is liable involuntarily to excite a fine variety of expectations. Ella Banks had lifted him out of his loneliness that morning when he first made her acquaintance. Her strength, her serenity, her beauty—what personality! what charm! So his thoughts ran upon her; and none of the younger men could have thought more about her. He would have been glad of her companionship often, and he had not allowed her acquaintance to drop, but of necessity the occasions upon which they could meet and converse were rare. When he did see her he always took care to mention it to everybody except the duchess. She did not like the subject. And he always said much the same thing: "I had a talk with Ella Banks to-day. Fine girl. Original too. I hope she will do well."

Like Lena, he had gone for a solitary walk that afternoon, but in the opposite direction, and not in search of solitude. He was in his lonesome mood that day, and his object was to walk it off. He had also the latent hope commonly experienced in this mood, that if he went out, chance would bring him across the right person to dissipate it. Chance should be given a chance to secure success; it should never be overworked for want of a helping hand. The duke, acting on this principle, made a long round by Red Rose Farm to Pratt's Place, and fell in with Ella, just as she was coming away from her studies with Mrs. Pratt. Her habits were so regular, it was easy to time her. They crossed the fields together to Red Rose Farm. By the same sort of chance they had met several times since they first became acquainted, and always with the same result. The duke forgot his loneliness and Ella expanded as with no one else. It was hard to say which was the happier for the time being.

The duke spent the evening alone in his own room. He

had had a curtain put up to cover the portrait of his grandmother, and generally he kept it covered, but that evening he drew the curtain aside, and looked long at the picture. While so engaged he was disturbed by a knock at the door. He covered the picture up again hurriedly, seized a book, and dropped into an armchair, like a man who was afraid of being caught. One would have thought that looking at his grandmother's portrait was something to be ashamed of.

The knock was impatiently repeated.

"Come in, bad girl," he said, resignedly.

"How did you know it was me?" Lena asked as she entered, accepting the sobriquet as a matter of course.

"There is only you who would knock at this august portal with such vulgar emphasis," he answered, putting aside his book.

"Vulgar emphasis is good," she said, seating herself on the arm of his chair, and thoughtfully stroking the site of his whiskers up the wrong way to make the bristles crackle.

"Don't Lena," he said, jerking his head aside.

Desisting, she put her arm round his neck, and kissed him instead.

"I wonder what you want!" he said, craning his neck to look at her.

She rose and threw herself into a seat opposite to him.

Much relieved, he resettled himself, folded his hands, crossed his legs and, waited.

There was a little table at her side with several books on it. She took up one and opened it. Her eye lighted on the words: "Barbara had only just time to hide the letter in her bosom."

"Why on earth," she asked irritably, after reading the passage aloud, "do men always make heroines hide letters in their bosoms? Only a man who had never worn a woman's dress could make her do anything so impossible. He wouldn't know how difficult it is to place a letter there, nor how unsafe it would be when it was there. I once tried it, to be a heroine. In the books they always deposit it there hurriedly. It took me quite ten minutes to accomplish the feat, and then the letter worked down as I moved, and finally dropped onto the floor."

"She turned over a few more pages and again read aloud:

"'Prone upon the ground, Barbara gave herself up to the luxury of tears'—there again!" she criticised. "The heroine always throws herself on the ground to weep. I tried that too once, and found it didn't answer at all. The best place for a good cry is a comfortable easy-chair. I never let myself go until I'm seated in comfort."

"What do you know about good cries, Lena?" the duke asked, with a keen glance at her.

"I—?" she answered, somewhat taken aback by the question—"oh, of course I have a good cry on occasion."

"I'm sorry to hear there is ever occasion," he said kindly. "I shouldn't have thought it."

"Ah!" Lena ejaculated. "One half of the world doesn't know how the other half lives!"

The duke took the truism for an indication of mood, and made no further inquiry into her sorrows. He waited once more, and after a pause she began again.

"Do you ever have your heartstrings pulled till you can't bear it?" she asked, with a puckered forehead.

"Who has been pulling your heartstrings so inconsiderately?"

"The *devil*!" she answered.

The duke lost countenance and recovered it.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Oh, there's no mistaking *his* touch," she said. "I wonder how you can go on as you do!"

The duke sat up and then resettled himself, as if he had only moved to get into a more comfortable position; but Lena was not deceived.

"Aren't you going to tell me what you want?" he asked.

"What I want?" she repeated, clasping and unclasping her hands. "My head is so full of ideas there isn't standing room in it." She leant forward and threw her hands out towards him. "Do you know," she demanded, "rich man that you are, what happens here to the poor people when sickness comes?"

"No," he rejoined, startled. "At least—well, I suppose the usual thing, as with all of us. They either get better or—er—they do not." He smiled as he spoke, as a man does to excuse himself when he has been betrayed into saying something so obvious that it is silly to express it.

"Oh, dear! how clever men are and how much they know!"

Lena exclaimed, looking up to the ceiling. "Well"—she lowered her eyes to his level and smiled deceitfully—"I suppose you think it right that one sick person should be given as good a chance to recover as another?"

"Well, my dear, yes, of course. Medical attendance—er—and all that sort of thing."

"Well, allow me to tell you, 'all that sort of thing' includes everything, except medical attendance, which the sick poor about here do not have." She put her hand to her head and frowned.

"Have you a headache, Lena?" he asked sympathetically.

"No—yes. At least, I have a pain in my head. It would look like forked lightning if you could see it. It comes when I have to think with a sore heart."

"Then the cure for it is to unburden your heart."

"I'm trying to, but you don't help me," she complained.

"I'm doing my best," he protested. "If you can tell me what to do for your relief, I will do it. If you cannot, I will try to find out for myself."

Her countenance cleared. "That's like you," she said. "I believe you'd do a lot of good if you knew how. I can show you one way—a very easy one for you."

"I am sorry it is easy," he rejoined, "that will discount the merit."

"Not at all," she answered. "The merits of a duke are always looked at under the microscope."

"Poor dukes!" he sighed.

"On the contrary, rich dukes, or it wouldn't be so," she flashed back.

"You are a cynical young person," he admonished her.

"I'm not," she contradicted. "It's your world that's the cynical young person. I don't measure worth by the standard of base coin."

"The world will learn better as it grows older," he hoped. "I—er—dislike cynicism and all that sort of thing myself. Cynicism is a poisonous emanation from bad natures. But you've not told me yet——?"

"No, let me tell you. What was I talking about?"

"The sick poor, I believe—" he was beginning.

"Yes, that's a bit of it," she caught him up. "The other

bit is the pitiable condition of the sick poor in the immediate vicinity of the rich and popular Duke of Castlefield Saye." She waited a moment for this to sink in, and then went on as if she were reading a leading article aloud. "Owing to bad management on the estate of Squire Appleton Pointz and the disgraceful condition of the village, fever is chronic among the work-people, typhoid is common, also phthisis, and of late there have been cases of diphtheria among the children. There is no possibility of isolating such cases in the crowded state of the cottages, and no place to which they can be sent for proper treatment."

The tinge of melancholy, which never quite left the kindly commonplace face of the duke, deepened now as he listened: "How do you know all this?" he said sharply.

"I know," she snapped, impatient of the doubt. "I'm all over the place. I've seen for myself."

He thought a moment: "But what can *I* do?" he said at last.

"You are the only one who can do anything," she answered hopefully. "Uncle Pointz is a pauper. The Pratts would help, of course; they're great at good works. But you are the man."

"What for?" He was vexed to know, she was so long coming to the point.

"To establish a hospital," she answered, amazed that he should need to be told. "Why not make the old Dower House on the sea-shore into a hospital? You'll never do anything else with it, you know, because some of your duchesses once lived in it."

"Are you speaking quite respectfully of my duchesses?" he asked politely.

"Quite—for me, beloved cousin. You forget my Brabant blood. But, anyway, I apologise, so excuse me this once like the dear you really are." She knelt down beside him. "The house is haunted, you know," she said. "I have seen the light myself from my window late at night. The poor dead duchess will never have rest for her suffering soul until something is done. Perhaps, if you gave the house up to the sick, she would be released. Good works are the salvation of ghosts."

He sat thinking, and she waited.

"Consider it settled," he said at last, with a deep sigh. "You shall have your hospital."

She flung her arms round his neck, and embraced him ecstatically. "Oh, you *are* a dear," she cried. "We will call it 'Her Repose,' and you and I will know that it is dedicated to the repose of the dear dead duchess."

These transports over, they fell to discussing the plan, he as eager about it now as she was.

But there was something else—she remembered it just as they were separating. "What are you going to do about Emily Ryecote?" she asked abruptly.

"What about her—the pretty one, isn't it?" he replied in surprise.

"Yes—the pretty one. She's disappeared—gone off!"

The duke had been saying a smiling good-night to her when she sprang this upon him. The smile remained on his lips, a cover to the annoyance which was working in his mind. It was a revival of what he had felt that morning in the fields when Algernon Pointz passed them, and Emily left him so abruptly to take the path which ended in a stagnant pond. He questioned Lena now, and having heard all that she could tell him, he said: "I'll send for old Ryecote. I must see to this."

He opened the door for her, and as she passed out she kissed him "good-night,"—and went to bed, well satisfied with the day's entertainment. Her last thought was of "Her Repose" and Fusty Ginger. "I shall see the man die in comfort," was the form it took.

CHAPTER XXIX

At Pointz there was no comfort. A sense of things gone wrong pervaded the whole place, indoors and out. The blight of chronic dissatisfaction was upon it. Every member of the family had his or her own private grievance, besides the great grievance they all had in common, the lack of means to take their proper place in Society—as they would have expressed it—social success being the one poor little ambition upon which their narrow minds were set. The power of display was the

heart's desire of them all, save the squire himself. They would have liked to keep open house in the country, to be known for their lavish entertainments during the London season, to make Society feel that their invitations were worth fighting for. And all this for their own aggrandisement. Never would they have dreamt of entertaining for more kindly motives. The pleasure of giving pleasure was unknown to them; but to have been in a position to patronise, to wound, to excite envy, would have been a joy. Their hospitalities would have been a matter of the most sordid calculation; from every guest invited they would have expected an ample return; in kind from their equals in rank, in prestige from their superiors, in homage from the crowd. The lack of means to this end they felt to be a wrong and resented it bitterly; and the flavour of this bitterness spoilt their taste for such of the good things of this world as were well within their reach. There was no delight for them in nature, in literature, in art. With the exception of the squire himself, not one of them could have been made to understand that there is joy in a fine thought finely expressed; joy in the feeling subtly stirred by a fine picture; joy in the music that uplifts the soul; joy in the open where the grosser appetites of the flesh cease from troubling, and nature makes her high appeal to the sense of beauty purely. By none of these things were they satisfied. Their mean ambition obsessed them. It obtruded itself into moments that might have been ecstatic but for the suggestion of something lacking, and that the thing which they had trained themselves to regard as the one thing needful—people; the kind of crowd that makes an occasion. On a summer day they could only think of what splendid weather it was for an outdoor party; without a party all the glory of it to them was bald and profitless. They were not human in the sense of being humane; they were gregarious animals, consorting with their own kind without loving them. If one of their associates fell, the whole herd would have trampled on him. All their actions were instinctive, and all the outcome of the primary instinct of self-preservation; but for lack of foresight they were wanton of the means, and for lack of adaptability incapable of saving themselves from the effects of their own idleness, extravagance, and waste. It was cross-bred, this last generation at

Pointz; a bad cross which had destroyed in them the graces of the finer strain. The blood of the baser kind of employers of labour, to whom business is business, and labourers are merely so many "hands" to be worked to the bone for the profits in which they are allowed no share, had swamped the attenuated stream, thinned by generations of self-indulgence, which the family had inherited from feudal ancestors, male and female, to whom their people had been a possession to be cared for. In this generation such refinement as remained to them was on the surface only, a trick of manner. The coarseness and strength of the mother's stock had prevailed, and the finer feelings upon which, as gentry, they had prided themselves, together with the consideration for others and the sympathetic insight which is so largely a component part of finer feelings, were extinct.

There was none of the picturesque beauty of broken hills at Pointz as at Castlefield Saye. The house stood, a central object, on the Flats—level land, backed in the distance by the moors and fronted by the sea. The district was bare of trees, most of the available timber having been ruthlessly sacrificed to raise money. The one important belt still left, girdled the house itself. Surviving giants from a prehistoric forest, visible from every point of the surrounding landscape, they remained, upstanding round about the building like a guard of honour, ostensibly ready for the purpose of defence, but in reality part of the parade, an addition to the pomp and circumstance, of the family pageant. Although it had gone to the squire's heart to sacrifice his trees, he had neglected to plant. He had resigned himself to the loss instead of actively repairing it, a stultifying attitude, debilitating to the character if it be adopted while there is still something to be done. In all these long years a goodly growth might have been going on, filling the gaps in his bare hedgerows, raising young plantations to the dignity of woods, and giving him a wholesome interest in life to take him out of himself. But no! he had no initiative. Like the rest of his herd, when one grazing ground was bare, his habit was to try another. The desert prospect about him vexed his heart, but his only remedy was to turn his back on it by shutting himself up in his library, and reading, without

profit, the endless record of man's misery-making propensities, of which all history, ancient and modern, is chiefly composed. Books were his anodyne. He read not for information but for distraction. If he could have banished "that Clutterbuck" with his periodical budgets, he would have banished all thought of his worries from his mind; but Clutterbuck had to be faced, and so had his family, and so had Mrs. Pointz—particularly Mrs. Pointz.

The squire considered Mrs. Pointz the mistake of his life, but it was not until the graciousness, which comes naturally to a well-bred brood, failed to appear in his own family, that he discovered it, and then the inference he drew from it was erroneous. He attributed to her birth the absence of the qualities in which Mrs. Pointz was conspicuously deficient. He had never observed that refinement, high principles, and religion are interdependent qualities, the outcome of carefully formed character and high ideals, rather than of social position, as he supposed. The best specimens of humanity are produced by the life of a large, united family, bound together by affection, acting on principle, dignified by habitual courtesy; theirs is good breeding in the best sense of the word—a form of good breeding possible to the humblest in station. It seems paradoxical to talk of a well-bred mongrel, but there is such a thing; a mongrel with admirable points. The squire's family failed in these points. With the exception of Godiva, they were more the children of their mother than their father. Their outlook upon life was her outlook, a vulgar outlook. In the vitiated atmosphere they created about the squire, who had been trained to breathe pure air, rarefied by refinement, there was no health. A stronger man would have withstood them, but the squire had no physique. He was capable of isolated efforts, but these left him exhausted, to fall again inevitably, a prey to his environment. A small, sallow, hopeless, ill-nourished man, he lived in his library, steeped in his books, and surrounded, so far as was possible, by such influences as he could collect to screen him from the truth of his position. Every glimpse of his bare acres was hidden by the great trees upon which he looked out; and every appointment about him—beautiful furniture, silk Persian carpets, fine old pictures, valu-

able books—was calculated to banish from his mind the harassing recollection of his embarrassed circumstances.

Interviews with Clutterbuck were a trial to the squire. He would have shirked them altogether if he could, but that was not possible. The best that he could do for himself was to postpone them, though that only resulted in an overwhelming accumulation of troubles to be met eventually with insufficient strength for half the number. When this happened, his way was to dismiss Clutterbuck with a promise to consider the matter, such promise being tantamount, as Clutterbuck well knew, to a postponement *sine die*.

This had happened time and again with regard to the state of the village, and it had not suited Clutterbuck's own convenience to press the matter. The villagers had complained in vain, but lately pressure had come from the Sanitary Authorities, a quarter that could not be safely ignored for long; and Clutterbuck found it imperatively necessary to trouble the squire. He came for the purpose just after breakfast one morning, the time when it pleased the squire to settle himself in the library with his books, and he particularly disliked to be disturbed. As a natural consequence Clutterbuck's intrusion threw him into a peculiarly irritable condition.

Clutterbuck excused himself. "I'm driven to trouble you, sir," he said, and his tremendous voice was calculated to inspire the belief that the force which drove him must indeed have been irresistible. The way in which the squire's debilitated nerves resented the noise was excruciating. "Fairly driven," Clutterbuck repeated. "But it's not my fault. I've done my best. I could manage the tenants, though there's a bad spirit abroad amongst them, a spirit of discontent, if I may say so. It comes from Pratt's Place. It's that Adnam." It was as if Clutterbuck had spat out when he mentioned Adnam. He knew the squire's attitude towards Adnam and his innovations, and thought to propitiate him by a show of subservience to his opinion. But the squire only glared at him. He did not share Mrs. Pointz's respect for Clutterbuck. "I've kept the people quiet," that gentleman pursued, "and it's not the people now. It's them Sanitary Authorities. They've been poking and peering, and putting their noses in where no noses ought to be. And they've made a report"—Clutterbuck had

some papers in his hand, and he now opened one of them, and began to read, condensing the report as he went along by culling out the worst points inconsecutively:

"The cottages in the village of Pointz are for the most part old and dilapidated, without spouting, without damp courses, and without paving of the curtilage around the house, so that the rain-water from the roofs saturates the ground. The roofs are of rotten thatch or defective tiles, which threaten to fall in upon the inhabitants, and have done so more than once. In several of them the rain comes through the roof and trickles down the internal walls. . . . Numbers of the houses are without back doors or back windows, so that there is no through ventilation. The windows are very small and often do not open. . . . Causes of nuisance were rubble drains, untrapped catchpits, and ditches containing stagnant house sewage in proximity to dwellings. . . . The tenants complain that the landlord will not do any repairs, but the landlord's agent, they say, will always supply them with straw or a few tiles for the roof——"

The squire drew down the corners of his mouth at this. "The 'landlord's agent' seems to be a man of means," he said pointedly.

"I use the means at my disposal, sir," Clutterbuck answered, not without dignity, and proceeded to read:

"The conditions of the farmsteads is deplorable. One of the principal causes of nuisance is the keeping of animals and the accumulation of manure from animals. Very rarely has a suitable manure pit been provided, and only in one instance, that of Red Rose Farm, did we find a covered one. As a rule, manure from cattle, horses, and pigs was thrown into heaps just outside the buildings from which it had to be removed. Much of this was washed away by rain into the channels and ditches. The remainder was trodden into a quagmire, which on some of the farmsteads is of enormous extent. . . . Filthy condition of the cowsheds . . . unsuitable character of the dairies, mere cupboards, without light or ventilation, cut off from the living room by a loose partition, and nearly always used as pantries and larders. Frequently an accumulation of terrible

filth, manurial and otherwise, is placed beneath the only opening by which fresh air can enter the so-called dairy. This is the case on the farms from which Closeminster draws its principal supply of milk. The cowsheds on these farms are mere hovels of rubble, with a little straw thrown over a few beams for a roof, and greatly overcrowded; fertile breeding-places for tuberculosis. . . . It was ordered that a copy of this report be sent to the estate agent, with a request that the unwholesome condition of these dairies be remedied within one month, but without result. . . ."

The squire was sitting at his writing-table, and as Clutterbuck, standing on the other side of it, went on with the report, he rested his elbows on the table, and covered his face with his hand. When Clutterbuck stopped, he looked up, with drawn features and haggard eyes.

"It's exaggerated," he said.

Clutterbuck passed his stumpy hand over his sleek head by way of reply.

"I say it's exaggerated!" the squire reiterated, thumping the table with his fist.

"Have you been to any of the farms, or in any of the cottages lately, sir?" Clutterbuck asked with a show of concern. The squire had not, and Clutterbuck knew it. "It's a considerable time now since I reported their condition to you myself——"

"Yes," the squire interrupted; "and I got you money for repairs; what did you do with it?"

"A mere drop in the ocean, sir, a mere drop in the ocean," Clutterbuck answered blandly, putting aside the sum as not worth accounting for. He was watching the squire cunningly out of his sharp little eyes, and behind the fat that masked the expression of his face, a smile was lurking. The squire had never asked how the money was spent, had never been to see. His wife had taken the matter in hand, and he had left the details to her. He remembered now. Algernon was bothering him for money at the time, and there had been a scene with Mrs. Pointz because the squire firmly refused to pay Algernon's debts with the money he had raised for repairs in the village. Then Mrs. Pointz suddenly gave in and agreed with him;

offered to relieve him of all trouble in the matter; was amiability itself; peace was restored; and he had heard no more of Algernon's debts, troubled himself no more about the cottages. And here was the day of reckoning—not a long score, he had only to put two and two together.

He thumped the table again with his fist, and ground his teeth. Befooled—disgraced. And all his own fault, more shame to him, his own most grievous fault. The rage in him showed itself without a word. Clutterbuck had seen nothing like it till now. The man before him was transformed. His eyes glared; he looked about to spring. Involuntarily Clutterbuck drew back from the table.

Then, suddenly, as it had arisen, the tempest ceased to rage. The squire sank back into his chair inert, exhausted.

"What's to be done?" he said weakly.

Clutterbuck looked about him, as if searching for a suggestion. He was masterly in the way of not committing himself.

"I must have money," the squire proceeded.

"There's money to be had," Clutterbuck assured him hopefully.

"Where? How? There isn't a penny of profit being got off the estate by anybody. We're all ruined—we—landed proprietors all over the country, by this accursed Free Trade."

"No, sir, excuse me, there's money being made. Emery Pratt is making money, Hallbin is making money, and Ellery Banks—it's wonderful the money he's been making of late."

"How?" the squire demanded.

Clutterbuck shrugged his shoulders slightly: "Intensive culture, manuring, choosing the right seed. He says there's twenty or thirty stalks to be got from one grain of wheat. Pratt began it, Hallbin's followed, and Banks took a leaf out of their books. He's been manuring heavily. You can't get anything out of the land if you put nothing into it, that's what he says. The land won't enrich itself if you keep it poor. But it's grateful. Give and it'll give again; double and treble what it receives. Ellery Banks has scored on every crop this season."

"Where did he get the capital?" the squire asked sharply.

"That girl of his. She started him, they say."

"But I thought," the squire exclaimed, thinking of the only way he knew of by which a handsome woman could earn large sums, "I thought she was well-conducted?"

"Oh, yes; none better. It's her lace. She got a thousand pounds from the duchess for one piece."

"I've heard of that piece," said the squire. "But since, she has refused to sell."

"She sold a small fortune's worth to some Americans that came to Closeminster awhile ago," Clutterbuck asserted positively. "I have it for a fact from Hallbin. He drove her in the day she sold the lace, and she told him."

The squire took up a paper knife, and criss-crossed the blotting-paper in front of him with it. After a pause he said: "I don't believe in the thousand pounds or the small fortune. The wonder-loving are liberal with their figures."

"Yes, sir, that's true," Clutterbuck agreed. "But there's no doubt about Ellery's crops. I inspected them myself. He had to have extra men to get them in. And he's kept three of them on." Clutterbuck coughed deprecatingly behind his hand. "The lease of Red Rose Farm is running out. The increase in value must be considered——"

The squire gave him an ugly look: "The rent should be raised to encourage a good tenant who is just beginning to prosper, eh?" he sneered. "It's a dirty mean system."

He threw the paper knife down on the table, and sat up. "You can go," he said.

Clutterbuck put up his papers deliberately.

"And the Sanitary Inspector, sir?" he said; "what shall I say——"

"Leave that report," said the squire. "And bring me the details, contracts, vouchers, everything concerning the repairs done with the money I gave you last for the purpose."

"Yes, sir," Clutterbuck answered dutifully. "Good morning, sir." The squire pursed up his mouth and eyed him grimly. "Good morning, sir," Clutterbuck repeated almost piteously.

But the only response was what he saw for himself in the squire's face. The squire had his eye on him.

Left alone, the squire sank back in his chair. He could face

a cur valiantly enough, but when it came to facing his own difficulties without the stimulus of anger, he collapsed. Money—he must have money. Something must be done. He must do something. But what? There he was, without a plan of campaign, without an adviser, without any sort of knowledge with which he could help himself; a man of leisure, a mere receiver of rents; hoodwinked, cheated; the victim of his own apathy. For a moment his eyes had been opened, and seeing himself betrayed, he had seen a whole “dirty mean system”; but without enlightenment. His eyes shut on the glimpse, and he was left in the dark as before.

Mrs. Pointz burst into the room: “There is a whole posse of workmen at the door, requesting to see you,” she exclaimed. “You won’t see them, of course.”

“I will see them, ‘of course.’ Why shouldn’t I see them, ‘of course’?”

Mrs. Pointz was taken aback. There was a new tone in his voice, a fine sneer, the tone of a master who means to be nasty; and Mrs. Pointz had come to order an obedient servant.

“But,” she stammered, “the insolence, common workmen——”

The squire rose deliberately and rang the bell. A footman answered it.

“Some workmen wish to see me?” the squire said.

“Yes, sir.”

“Show them in.”

“Yes, sir.”

The man withdrew. The squire returned to his seat at the table.

“I will see them alone,” he said. But as he spoke the men were shown in, and Mrs. Pointz, with a defiant toss of her head, dragged a chair to the table, and sat down beside him. Rather than provoke a vulgar scene, he let her be. She had none of the delicacy, the proud reticence, of a well-bred woman. Before the children, before the servants, she flouted him; and now, before these workmen, he knew that she would make him contemptible if he opposed her.

The men filed in diffidently, with their caps in their hands—decent steady-looking men, evidently smartened up in their best for the occasion. The squire had feared that it was a

deputation from his own people, and was relieved when he recognised the Sunday clothes in which he had seen Adnam's men week after week march into church. There was a healthy, prosperous air about them, the result of the wholesome conditions of their life of late. They had evidently not come to beg, and that was another relief to the squire, nor did they seem anxious. As they came in they touched their foreheads with their caps by way of salute, and then formed up at a respectful distance in front of the writing-table, and glanced about them with frank interest in the squire's luxurious surroundings, but with a detached air, as though their part in the proceedings was to be passive. As a matter of fact, which the squire discovered immediately, they had put their case unreservedly into the hands of one of their number, the most inconspicuous in appearance, and left it in full faith to him to do their business for them. It cannot be said that he came to the front; he seemed to have been worked there at the will of the majority; made apparent by eye and gesture, as they silently edged him forward. But he was quite at his ease.

"We have to apologise for this intrusion, sir," he said, "and to thank you for having the goodness to receive us."

"Your coming here is a most improper proceeding," Mrs. Pointz said severely, giving the squire no time to speak for himself. "If you have any grievance, you should have gone to Mr. Clutterbuck, the estate agent. He is the proper person to attend to your business, whatever it is. The squire has more important matters to see to. A pretty thing it would be if he was to be troubled——"

The squire turned on her, driven to assert himself by the flicker of a smile which he detected on the face of the little man. "Since they are here, I will attend to them myself," he said, in a rasping, peremptory tone that surprised her into silence. "Who are you, and what is your business with me?" he asked.

"We are workmen in the employ of Mr. Adnam Pratt," the little man replied, "but about to be dismissed, our—er—job for him being finished. He authorises me to say that he can give each man here an excellent character both for industry and steadiness."

"A few months' character, earned for the purpose of imposing upon us," Mrs. Pointz burst out again.

The squire stopped her with an impatient gesture.

"They have been here over a year, and their conduct before they came here has been carefully inquired into," the little man pursued imperturbably. "We have good characters from former employers, and a full and satisfactory record of their careers in every case."

"*Their*, you said?" commented the squire, raising his eyebrows.

"We have the material to satisfy you, sir, on the subject of character," was the quiet reply.

This masked retreat was helped by Mrs. Pointz, who burst in again before the squire could sift that enigmatical "*their*" to the bottom with other questions.

"Why do you bring your characters here?" she said. "We don't want men."

The little man, ignoring the lady, continued to address the squire: "These men have worked together for some time now," he pursued. "They know each other, and would like to stay in this neighbourhood——"

"Really!" the squire interrupted. "They like the society, and the climate and soil are to their taste!"

Mrs. Pointz laughed grimly, and the squire wished he had not spoken. Something in the way the little man looked—just glanced—at them both, made him feel petty.

"The men are respectable," the little man said evenly, but the squire understood that he was claiming civil treatment for them. "They are anxious to remain in this neighbourhood, and they see an opening for their energies if you, sir, would be so good as to make terms with them."

"Be so good as to explain yourself," said the squire. Mrs. Pointz would have interposed, but he checked her with a sudden vindictive grip on her arm that astonished her.

"I must beg you to excuse me, sir," the little man began, "if I venture to quote facts with which you, as a great landowner, must be perfectly well acquainted. I must do so in order to present our case to you, and not at all for the purpose of presuming to teach you. You know that agriculture has fallen into a deplorable state of neglect in this country of late years, that land has gone out of cultivation at a perilous rate.

England has fallen far behind the times. The area cultivated having been reduced, the agricultural labourers have been either sent or driven away to swell the ranks of the unemployed in the cities. Here, in this fertile region, this fine climate, one sees field after field given over to what you call 'permanent pasture'—grass three inches high and thistles in profusion, hardly enough to feed one cow on each three acres; yet this land might be producing rich and profitable crops. While the British farmer struggles on in the old way, a totally new agriculture has been created abroad, a system as superior to modern farming as modern farming is to the old three-field system of our ancestors. The rotation system has given us one crop every year to the six or nine crops which might be produced in a twelvemonth by intensive high farming. Twenty-eight bushels of corn to the acre is the average with which the British farmer contents himself. Of late Mr. Emery Pratt——"

But this was too much for Mrs. Pointz's self-control. "Mr. Emery Pratt," she burst out again. "Are you holding up a common yeoman person by way of example to us?"

"Excuse me, madam, if I venture to correct you," the little man said, with great suavity. "An *uncommon* 'yeoman person.' The breed is becoming extinct. There will never be another Yeoman Pratt. Seraph Pratt, a good man on the land too, will be 'Esquire' as soon as he comes into the property. There are those who will be only too glad to conciliate him with that or any other form of flattery that may appeal to him—a wife, say, from amongst their daughters—by way of interest on the mortgages he holds on their land." He bowed to her as if to put a full stop to that part of the discussion, and resumed his address to the squire at the point where he had been interrupted—"Yeoman Pratt and Farmer Hallbin have reached from forty to fifty bushels. Under the allotment system, in other places an even higher average is reached."

The squire sat up. "Have you come to talk to me about allotments?" he demanded angrily.

"There are several farms unlet on this property," the little man replied indirectly; "and many cottages deserted and in ruins. There is great wealth to be got out of the land were it properly developed. Enlightened methods of cultivation would make you master of one of the finest properties in the

country, sir. The experiment has been tried elsewhere with admirable success by enterprising social reformers——”

The little man had used three words of ill-omen for the success of his mission. A high sense of honour had descended to the squire intact from his ancestors, but it was little more than a decoration, because of the circumscribed area in which he had learnt to exercise it. With a wider conception of the duties of his position he might have applied his sense of honour to good practical purpose for his own benefit in the plight to which he found himself reduced; but, barren individualist as he was, he had no perception of the interdependence of all human interests and it never occurred to him that, in the long run, it was by helping others that he could best help himself. To be an enlightened social reformer was not a duty which he felt to be in honour required of him. The only tribute that he paid to Society in return for the position it accorded to him, was a keen conservatism in the matter of his own privileges. He had no objection to extend these in his own case; in fact, he claimed the right to do so if he could; but he held that to extend any such privileges to the lower orders was to endanger the well-being, not only of the caste to which he belonged by birth, but of the whole nation. Any attempt to do this meant that the country was going to the dogs, sir. Precedent was his god. To say that a thing had never been done was tantamount to saying that it must not be done. He could condone bad old practices that were sanctioned by precedent, but he would not consider any plan hitherto untried. Social changes were his especial bugbear; his antipathy to them amounted to mania. He could see nothing but vulgar self-interest in the measures advocated by his political opponents; self-interest which they were prepared to push to any extent, however dangerous to the state. He was obliged to acknowledge that there were men of his own caste among the Liberals, but he declared that they were men of bad character, outcasts; or, if it were a case in which such slander was too obviously ridiculous, that they were suffering from aberration of intellect and should not be allowed at large. The very word “reform” was an offence to him. It was one of several words—such as “radical,” “enterprise,” “experiment,” “progress”—which had lost their original significance for him. The opposite party used them, therefore were

they debased; and only to low, vulgar, and debased uses could they be put. "Radical" stood only for a detestable political party; "reform" meant low Radical measures; "enterprise" represented the blatant advertisements of vulgar tradesmen, pushing their wares; "experiments" were the tricks by reckless adventurers to attain their own questionable ends. With this bias, it was inevitable that the theory that property might be as advantageously dealt with by other means than those which had been handed down to him by tradition as the only means possible for a gentleman, should stir him to resentment. When the little man followed up his mention of the "allotment system" with the three objectionable words in one phrase, the squire thumped the table to stop him; but the little man, choosing to misunderstand, only bowed as if in acknowledgment of tentative applause, and proceeded with increased animation, like one encouraged. The squire's irritation had not escaped him, however, and, divining the cause of it, he went off on another tack. As he spoke, the squire's attention became keenly riveted, but less on what he was saying than on the man himself.

"Whistling," he continued "is a national propensity in England. Dryden's Cymon, you will remember, whistled as he went for want of thought. So do the English. They whistle their way along, they don't think. Moreover, they are suspicious of any one who does think. And if to the faculty of thought be added the endeavor to turn thought to practical account, the thinker is viewed with aversion, opposed, shunned, cast out, trampled to death. Yet the country is at the mercy of some few thinkers in every generation, who, whether they are thinking rightly or wrongly, by the power of thought easily impel the thoughtless whither they will. The country is full of dull, slow-witted people, inhospitable to such a degree that they will not entertain even an idea if they can help it. Generous impulses are the exception, but at odd times people will fly to an extreme under the impulsion of emotion roused by some circumstance which touches them sentimentally, such as the Jumbo incident. The nation does well to speak of the bulk of itself as 'the common herd,' for most herd-like are the people in all their propensities; a blundering, stick-in-the-mud people, liable to panic, but, for lack of fine perception,

only to be set in motion, when they must be moved, by dogs barking at their heels, and sticks rattling on their backs. Let them alone, and they will sit supine, singing 'Britons never shall be slaves,' to the amusement of the world—which sees them enslaved by catchwords; in bondage to the prophets of evil; blinded by their intellectual apathy; left behind, groping their way, while other nations with their eyes open shoot ahead, making straight for the winning post—Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number—which is the right goal of all human endeavour."

The little man paused here, but the squire, with his hand on Mrs. Pointz's arm to restrain her, nodded to him to go on. It was not like him to allow himself to be harangued by a workman, but this particular workman perplexed him, and it was for the purpose of making him out that he listened.

"Suggestion is the force that moulds opinion here," the little man pursued. "You discountenance inquiry; you reject knowledge; you act on suggestion—malevolent suggestion. You have a peculiar aptitude for making your own miseries by the faith you put in phrases, and the kind of phrases in which you put your faith. 'Agricultural depression,' 'no profits for the farmer,' 'the hopeless condition of the unemployed,' 'foreign competition'—there you are! Those are the phrases to which you have submitted as though they were fiats not to be resisted. You have been paralysed by them. You have made it a fact that the land does not support its population by accepting the suggestion that it cannot—and rejecting the proofs that it can. How have you met 'foreign competition'? By leaving your markets empty of national produce; by ceasing to cultivate for yourselves. The antidote to foreign competition is co-operation. Have you applied it? Not you! The discovery did not come from the right source. It was made by practical working people, and you will take no advice from them, you, the gentry, the governing class. You would rather sink the Ship of State yourself, and go down governing, with nothing left you but your pride. So the people, with millions of good acres lying waste about them, and the will and the power, if by your leave they might but use it, to produce enough for the whole nation and to spare, have grown anæmic under your laws which compel them to give in and pay out.

Upwards of sixty millions annually go to the foreigner for petty produce alone—eggs, butter, bacon, cheese, vegetables, fruit—why? With knowledge, which is easy of acquisition, and energy, there is wealth enough to be had in the land, who is to blame that it lies idle? The landowners who have resigned themselves to ignorance and impoverishment. For what do they know of the land and its resources, most of them? Just what they can learn by tramping over the fields in the autumn with a gun. These are the legislators——”

“Cincinnatus was one of the kind,” the squire interrupted him with a grim smile, “and legislated pretty successfully, I believe.”

“Yes,” was the quick rejoinder, “but Cincinnatus could handle a plough.”

Mrs. Pointz, no longer to be restrained, burst out at this: “I know what you are! You’re a common agitator!”

“I am sorry, madam, to have agitated you.”

“You have *not* agitated me,” she retorted angrily.

Men have a code of signals by which they can make themselves understood to each other on the subject of women; and nothing brings two men together more surely than the perception in common of something that is “So like a woman!” With an exchange of glances the squire and the speaker found themselves in agreement on the subject of a contentious woman, and the squire became tolerant of the man regardless of his opinions.

“You are well paid for this, I am sure,” she went on.

“The pleasure of seeing you, madam, is my only reward,” he replied.

The squire lost countenance. The men laughed. “Good old Mickleham!” one of them muttered audibly.

“Is your name Mickleham?” the squire asked.

“Yes—sir.”

“What are you?”

There was a movement amongst the men, a coming together, as their interest concentrated on the answer to this question.

“I am spokesman for the party,” was the reply.

“Got out of it again!” one of the men whispered.

“You bet!” expressed the general opinion.

“You have something to gain,” Mrs. Pointz hotly insisted.

"No, madam, I assure you. I am not personally interested in this application, as I have not—er—lost my job."

Again the squire noticed the faint flicker of a smile on his face; he had also noticed that he stumbled over certain words and expressions as if unaccustomed to use them. There was a conclusion to be drawn from these two indications, and the squire, with eyebrows twitched together in a nervous frown, was trying to arrive at it. He looked hard at the little man.

"Mickleham?" he said, questioning the name.

Mickleham folded his hands and waited, looking at the squire, but indifferently, as if the point at issue did not concern him.

"Explain yourself, *Mr. Mickleham*," the squire said, throwing down the paper cutter and leaning back in his chair when he had spoken, to watch the effect of this last shot. But Mickleham stood unmoved. "You were saying?" the squire urged impatiently.

"I was going to say," Mickleham rejoined, "that the landowner, with no wide experience of human nature and no care for any interest he does not recognise as in some sort his own, is too limited in his outlook to cope with the difficulties of his position at the present time. His only chance is to realise his own deficiencies and remedy them by getting abreast with modern thought and by adopting modern methods—by modernising himself altogether, in fact. He has no initiative, no enterprise. Let him follow the initiative and imitate the enterprise of more enlightened men. Let him drop the low standard of his barren individualism and enrol himself in the great corps co-operative——"

"Is it possible," Mrs. Pointz angrily exclaimed, turning on her husband, "is it possible that you do not see what this man is? He's a rank Socialist. If you listen to him it will be the thin end of the wedge. They'll get the land from you, every acre of it up to the house, and all we shall have to look out upon will be clothes lines hung with their dripping rags on washing-days!"

The squire had shied at the obnoxious word "enterprise," and would probably have ended the interview at that point if she had held her peace, but her interference provoked him to oppose her.

"*Will* you be quiet!" he said, his voice muffled by rage. Then, turning, he nodded to Mickleham. "What is it you want?" he demanded.

"I want to point out that there is wealth in your estate if you choose to develop it," Mickleham answered. "You could produce in quantities everything now being imported to the enrichment of other countries. Pointz is in a particularly good position for the purpose. You have a large market near at hand. Closeminster and its environs would take all that you could send, and be only too glad to get it. It would pay you to sell your good English produce at less than the cost of foreign importations, because the cost of transport for such a short distance would be infinitesimal. Here are men ready and willing to work with you on equitable terms, men enough to make a beginning; and there are plenty more to be had——"

The squire was frowning portentously. "You glib theorists overlook the difficulties," he said.

"In this matter the difficulties have been the same everywhere, and everywhere they have been successfully conquered when they were properly tackled. Surely England can do what little Denmark has done!"

"I suppose these gentlemen can guarantee the capital necessary?" the squire asked ironically.

"The capital will be forthcoming," the little man replied.

The squire laughed grimly. "*In-deed!*" he ejaculated. "Farms on equal terms, I suppose, small holdings, allotments, and all that sort of thing, eh? No, thank you!" He emphasised his refusal with a thump of his fist on the table. There was a pause, during which he sat glowering at the men. He sat so, with some of the finest land in the county lying waste about him; blinded by prejudice even to his own best interests; hide-bound by conservatism; without adaptability; unable to realise that any change could be a change for the better.

"You have your answer," he said at last.

Mickleham bowed. Then, with a gesture, motioned to the men to go. Touching their foreheads with their caps again by way of salute to the squire, they turned, and filed out of the room as they had entered it, stolidly.

Mickleham was about to follow them, when a picture on the wall caught his eye. "Goya!" he exclaimed. He went up to

the picture, and looked into it. "Yes, by Jove—Goya! I would give—" he was beginning, but stopped short, and it was as if he had suddenly effaced himself.

The squire had been going to think something too—what was it? The thought eluded him. "You were saying—?" he asked.

The little man was peering into the picture again, and again he burst out: "Yes, I am right. One of the finest specimens of Goya's art I've ever seen! You're a rich man to be able to keep it, squire!"

Mrs. Pointz boiled over at this. She jumped up. "Man!" she cried, "you forget yourself strangely!"

Mickleham looked at her quickly, like one suddenly recalled to himself, and puzzled to think where he is.

"I beg your pardon, gracious lady," he said, "a thousand pardons. You speak the truth. I had forgotten myself."

"This is intolerable, really intolerable," Mrs. Pointz protested, attacking the squire. "How long are you going to endure the insolence of this *creature*?"

The squire rose. In anything but his own business he was not a fool. He looked at the Goya and he looked at Mickleham. Their eyes met, and it was a look of intelligence that flashed between them.

"You were saying—?" the squire queried again.

"I know a collector of Goyas," Mickleham answered eagerly. He was speaking now with great animation. "He has been on the lookout for this picture for years. It was known to exist, but it could not be found. He would give a good deal to possess it."

It seemed to the squire that he had heard of this collector before; what was his name?

"But I am wasting your valuable time," the little man went on before he could ask. "Pray excuse me. Your servant, dear madam," he bowed low to Mrs. Pointz, less formally to the squire, and was gone abruptly.

Mrs. Pointz stood with clenched fists and her arms stretched down on either side, foaming with indignation. "Well!" she almost shrieked. "'Dear madam'!" But here her outraged dignity choked her, and it was several moments before she could articulate another word. "Insulted," she gasped at last,

"by a common workman. 'Dear madam'! And you stood there and let him. The liberty! A low, vulgar Socialist—and you—cowering!"

That was the mistake she made. The squire was not of the cur kind; what little blood he had in him was good. And he had not given her her head because he was afraid of her, but because he was indolent, and it required less effort to sit tight than to pull up. Also he had never fully realised until that morning what an amount of vice there was in her capers. The sportsman holds that vice must be dealt with severely, and the squire was a sportsman. He looked at her. The skin roughened by gluttony, and brick-red now with rage; the ugly pepper and salt of her coarse ill-dressed hair; the gaunt form bared of all grace of womanly softness by the attrition of mean thought and strife; every repulsive detail of her personality he took in at a glance, and his distaste for her showed as never before in the expression of his face. Abusive epithets are weapons of the boomerang type; they recoil in contempt on the person who hurls them. There was strength in the squire at that moment, and she felt it. Her domineering spirit, the cowardly spirit of the bully, sank; the clammy chill of an unaccountable dread crisped her flesh.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she demanded, making an unsuccessful effort to hide the trepidation that was gaining upon her.

With a contemptuous smile the squire glanced from her to the Goya.

"Your powers of penetration are as remarkable," he said with cutting sarcasm, "as your tact and delicacy." He surveyed her again from head to foot. "You can go," he added, as if he were dismissing an unsatisfactory servant. "I have no further use for you."

"Appleton!" she remonstrated, clasping her hands.

"It is an unpleasant sight, a woman cowering," he observed.

"Oh, Appleton," she was beginning——

"You heard what I said," he interrupted harshly. "I have no further use for you. This is a shock to you, I am afraid. You had not realised that I am the kind of worm that turns with a vengeance, always, sooner or later?" He looked like

another man. Standing there, cool, sarcastic, smiling disagreeably, he seemed to expand, as is the disconcerting way at times of small men whose reserve of power has been inadequately gauged by their weight avoirdupois. "Do you hear me?" he exclaimed in a more threatening tone, but without raising his voice. "Go"—he raised his clenched fist, and at every sentence took a step towards her, and she a step back nearer to the door—"go, and trouble me no more! Go, before I ring and have you turned out of the room! Go—and help Clutterbuck to account to me for the money which you two had from me for the repairs of the cottages at Pointz."

At that, with a cry, she put her hands up to her head, as if the blow had been physical and the pain of it was there, and turned and fled. Just then the squire caught a glimpse of his own face in a mirror on the wall, a strange face, out of which misery had carved all that had ever made it pleasant to contemplate.

CHAPTER XXX

MRS. POINTZ, flying in a panic headlong from the library, ran up against her son Algernon in the hall. He had arrived unexpectedly, and the sudden sight of him added to the disorder of his mother's mind.

"Algernon—you here! Oh, what is it? what is it? what is it?" she cried, clinging to him and shaking him vehemently.

"What, indeed!" he answered coolly, grasping her arm and pushing her before him into the morning-room, which happened to be nearest. "What have you heard?" he asked, when he had shut the door.

She stood before him, all bewildered, clasping and unclasping her hands and looking about her as if in search of something.

"Your father," she cried. "That horrid little man——"

"Well, after all he is my father," Algernon checked her. He was always a model of propriety when somebody else's propriety was concerned.

"I'm not speaking of him," she rejoined. "I mean I am. Of both of them."

Algernon pushed her into an armchair. Since evidently it was not his affairs that were the cause of her agitation, he did not mind.

"There!" he said, "sit still and recover yourself. When you can speak coherently perhaps you'll tell me what you're making such a scene about. The servants in the hall must have thought you mad."

"Never mind the servants," she retorted. "What are servants? It was that man—that little man. He's an agitator. He's a Socialist. He's got hold of your father. There's some understanding between them. The Goya did it. I saw them look at each other. Your father was awful. He turned me out of the room. It's all about the money. Money, money, money——"

"There, that'll do," Algernon said nastily. "Don't let's have any more hysterics. I can't stand hysterics and I won't. I'm in difficulties myself. And I came down here to you for help and find you going on like a lunatic."

"I can't help you," she cried. "I can't help any one. I want help myself. I've helped you too much. Go away."

"With pleasure, if that's any help to you," he said. The gong sounded just then. He waited until he could make himself heard again. "Are you coming to lunch?" he asked. She shook her head. "Shall I send you some?" Again she shook her head. Then she pulled herself together and sat up. The claims of her appetite, always liberally indulged, had been roused by the sound of the gong, and became on the instant importunate. There was still something left to live for. After a quick mental survey of the dining-room table in comparison with the limited choice that would be brought to her here, on a tray, she decided for the wider sphere of action.

"I'll follow you presently," she said, speaking in her normal tone.

Algernon strode off without another word or look. He had inherited appetite from his mother, an astonishing appetite for a variety of things, most of them undesirable.

The family, with the exception of the squire and his lady, had begun luncheon when he entered the dining-room. There was a general exclamation at his unexpected appearance. Lena Kedlock, in her riding habit, was one of the party.

"You here? Well, that is cheering at all events," was Algernon's conciliatory greeting. He hated her and feared her too. With her uncanny insight she always made him feel that from her no secrets could for long be hidden; and her opinion of him, to which she gave unqualified expression, and recklessly sharp tongue, made her as unsafe as a barrel of gunpowder on a bonfire. There was no frightening her, no winning her by flattery; he had tried both expedients and been badly worsted. His only hope was in a careful restraint of manner and a consistent show of respect.

"You rode over?" he said, taking a seat opposite to her.

"Not exactly," she replied. "I happened to be riding by when the pangs of hunger seized me, and I came in to forage for food."

Mrs. Pointz stalked into the room and took her seat. She had made herself presentable with a celerity that did credit to her self-control. A little extra grimness was the only trace left of the recent storm. Her eyes for such kindly fruits of the earth as decked the sideboard was as alert as ever; her appetite was unimpaired; and, at the same time, her social interests, in so far as Lena might further them, were not neglected. She bestowed a peck on Lena's cheek, which that young lady politely rose and went forward to receive.

"Don't get up, my dear," Mrs. Pointz protested. "I am late. It has been a busy morning." She stopped to peer into a dish which the butler had brought to her. When she had rioted amongst the contents with a fork and spoon, picking and choosing each morsel she took, she resumed: "And how is the dear duchess? And the duke? And Lady Ann? Is there any news at the Castle?"

"Oh, they're all right," Lena answered. "At least, Ann isn't very bright. Some cardiac affection, I'm afraid."

Algernon pricked up his ears at this, but as Mrs. Pointz mistook "cardiac" for a nonsensical reference to games of cards, the statement only puzzled her.

"No news, I think," Lena rattled on. "Oh, yes, I forgot. The duke has had his grandmother's portrait covered up with a curtain."

They all looked "Why?" at her. She answered their inquiring eyes off-hand.

"The reason he gives is that a picture becomes invisible if you see it every day, and it is hard both on you and on the picture, if it be a good one, that you should lose sight of it in that way. He considers that the only way to treat great works of art with proper respect is as the Japanese treat them, by keeping them rolled up out of sight most of the time—so he says. But I think myself that he finds it inconvenient to have his grandmother's eyes always upon him. Have you ever noticed her eyes? She looks right through you into the inmost secret chamber of your mind. I have always to do a hurried spring-cleaning and readjust my mental furniture to make the place decently presentable, when she looks at me. I expect the duke has to do the same, poor dear old youth, and finds the restraint intolerable."

"*Pâté de foie gras*," Mrs. Pointz commanded the butler. "If you have none, then get some. In any case get some. Open a fresh pot."

The butler, the only servant present, left the room.

"Any news here?" Lena asked in return. She looked at Mrs. Pointz expectantly, for she knew of the deputation to the squire that morning, and was anxious about the result. But Mrs. Pointz was thinking of *pâté de foie gras* and took no notice.

"It's time there was some news here," Algernon remarked, looking at his numerous sisters. "Weddings in the family are long overdue. Look at Godiva!"

Godiva bridled.

"What's wrong with Godiva?" Lena said sharply, seeing with pity that the taunt had hit Godiva hard.

"Well—er—Godiva is our eldest hope," Algernon rejoined suavely, but with a look that somehow made apparent her age, her thinness, her blotched complexion, her lustreless hair—every disadvantage of her appearance looked at from the point of view of the marriage market. "It is for her to set an example. So many girls are a heavy burden for an estate to carry; and this estate can't carry you all permanently."

"You mean you'll turn us all out when you come into it?" Godiva said.

"Well, my dear Godiva," Algernon answered, "I would not put it so coarsely myself. But, as a man of property, my duty

will be to marry. And then what will become of you all? I am speaking in your own interests."

"How kind!" said Godiva. "And such a help too, seeing that we only need to be reminded of our duty and we shall at once go and do it. I am Miss Pointz of Pointz. Whom would you recommend me to take of all the eligible young men you bring here?"

"Scored there, Godiva!" Lena applauded. Algernon never did anything to further his sisters' interests.

"My advice to you, Miss Pointz, is to take anything you can get," he said. "Why not Seraph Pratt, if he'll have you? He'll have what he would call a tidy bit, I expect. And he'll be 'Esquire' right enough as soon as his father's out of the way."

Mrs. Pointz uttered a cry that startled them all. "That's what he said!" she exclaimed.

"Steady, mother," Algernon warned her. "If you've finished your lunch, perhaps you'd better go and rest."

"Go and rest," she replied, "after all I've gone through this morning! This house has been overrun with Socialists, Lena, and agitators, and I've been grossly insulted, and—" she began to whimper—"there was no one to defend me. Your uncle was the worst of all."

"Nonsense, auntie," Lena said kindly, getting up as she spoke and going to her. "You must be mistaken. It was Adnam's men who were here this morning, and they're all decent bodies. Come, let me take you to your room, and bathe your poor head, and you tell me all about it. The duchess will want to know——"

Lena dropped this pearl of a suggestion haphazard, but nothing could have been more effectual. It opened up a delightful prospect to Mrs. Pointz of coming into intimate touch with the duchess, who had always kept her at arm's length. The *pâté de foie gras* ceased to be worth waiting for. "Yes!" she exclaimed, staggering to her feet, "the duchess must know! Lena, you will tell her all? She has a feeling heart. She will understand."

Lena put an arm round Mrs. Pointz, and took her up to her room. Mrs. Pointz, with a view to what the duchess was to be told, did her best to make her sufferings apparent. She re-

quired much assistance to be got upstairs, and, once in her room, gave herself up to Lena's ministrations like one too exhausted to do anything for herself, or to care what happened to her. But all the time she talked—talked for the benefit of the duchess. So long as she kept this object before her, she expressed the most proper sentiments, but these, as she proceeded, became inextricably mixed up with the resentment and bitterness which actually possessed her, the result being a curious mingling of pious resignation to the will of heaven and abusive threats aimed at the squire and the whole situation.

"I do not regret a single sacrifice I have made for my husband and family," she protested, "and heaven knows I have been sacrificing myself all the time. And I *have* laboured too! What would have become of the property but for me with that wretched incapable man letting everything go to rack and ruin rather than trouble himself? Self-indulgence, Lena, that's what it is. They're all alike. They haven't a scruple, not one of the family. You can't believe a word they say. But they shall see now what I can do! Heaven has seen fit to afflict me, and doubtless it is all for the best. Thy will be done is what I always say, and never a word have they had from me but what was gentle and loving. It's the only way to teach them, and I have taught them. And now to be spoken to like that and turned out of the room—but I'll make him pay for it—with a stick, if there's no other way."

Lena, tending her body and mind with a beautiful thoroughness, soothed her with sympathetic words and magnetic touch, packed her up on a sofa, and finally induced her to compose herself "for everybody's sake." By that time she was genuinely exhausted. It was her habit to sleep at this hour, and finally habit prevailed, and she dropped off. Lena stood looking at her for a while to make sure, then she noiselessly lowered the blinds, and stole from the room. Finding Mrs. Pointz's maid lingering in the corridor, expecting to be called, word having reached her that "there were tantrums on," Lena gave her orders to take her lady tea as soon as she should awake. Then she went down to the hall. The affectionate family, accustomed to "tantrums," had dispersed; not a soul was about.

What Lena had gathered principally from Mrs. Pointz's ravings was that the squire was much to be pitied. The desire.

to help and comfort is common enough, the power to do either is much more rare; but Lena had the gift. She was always at her best in times of trouble. She went at once to the library in search of the squire, and found him sitting at his writing-table, with his elbows resting upon it, and his face covered with his hands. He heard her enter the room, and looked up. She put her arm round his neck and kissed his face all over. For a moment it was doubtful whether he was going to laugh or cry. Finally he laughed. It was Lena—Lena the tiresome, Lena the incalculable, Lena the delightful, Lena the good and the bad, Lena the lovable. The squire extricated himself.

“That’ll do,” he said. “I am not accustomed to so much affection all at once. It is too much for me.”

“I should think so,” said Lena, “on an empty stomach. Enough to make you sick—O Lord!” She looked round apprehensively, and dropped her voice. “It’s a good thing auntie didn’t hear that! The indelicacy of my phraseology would have knocked her flat—and it was such a good specimen,” she added regretfully, as if she thought the effort deserved a bigger audience. “But as I was saying, beloved uncle, you’ve had no lunch, and an empty man is like a ship without ballast, easily upset. Come and have some lunch. There’s nobody about. We shall have the dining-room to ourselves, and the table has not been cleared.”

“I have no appetite,” said the squire.

“Indeed,” she rejoined. “I envy you.”

“Have you had no lunch?” he exclaimed. “Are you hungry?”

“Famishing,” she replied, inwardly offering her benevolent intention as whitewash for the falsehood. “Riding does make you voracious, especially when you’re late for lunch. Come!”

The squire rose at once, the hospitable instinct paramount. She clasped her hands round his arm, and deposited him in his own seat at the dining-room table.

“We’ll wait on ourselves,” she said, mixing him a whiskey and soda as she spoke, which he took from her hand and drank mechanically. “So much nicer. We can’t talk secrets with the servants in the room.”

“Why, what secrets have you to talk?” he asked, beginning

to revive under the influence of the whiskey and soda. "Here, sit down, and let me do the waiting."

"No, let me—for a treat."

She had been carving a bird while she was speaking, and now set a dainty morsel before him. The beneficent spirit helping him, he took to it kindly. Lena, by way of penance, kept up the pretence of hunger by eating too, while at the same time she saw to it that the squire made a satisfactory luncheon. Diverted by her lively chatter, he cast off his cares for the moment and responded to her kindly attentions. When he would eat no more, she lighted a cigarette for him and poured out a glass of liqueur.

"Now, what shall we play at?" she said, but she gave him no time to reply. "Suppose you ride back with me? I dare bet you've not been out to-day."

"No," he said, and instantly the morning misery swept back upon him. "But I must go now. I must go to Pointz. And I want to see Emery Pratt!"

"We'll go together," she said, rising and ringing the bell. "I'll order the horses."

The village was out of her way, but she insisted on accompanying the squire. The autumn afternoon was close and grey and still. The age-old trees shed their yellowing leaves about them as they rode beneath. The trampling feet of the horses alone broke the silence. Lena, always keenly sensitive to atmospheric influences, was analysing her own sensations; the squire, in sombre thought, glanced about him, as if the place were new to him and not to his taste. Until they were clear of the grounds about the house, however, there was nothing at all disturbing to be seen. Here, the air of affluence which it was the policy of the family to keep up in their immediate surroundings, both to hide from themselves all reminder of the real state of their affairs and to impose upon the public, was well maintained. Everything that should be trim was trimmed, and even in the wild luxuriance of the park, there was evidence of lavish expenditure. The roads were well kept. There was no rankness or overgrowth in brake or hollow to suggest neglect. Nature had been curbed and restrained by art on every side just to that point of ordered

disorder which makes the beauty of such places. The squire sighed as he looked about him. If he had had the money, he assured himself, he would have kept up his whole estate to this level, but, considering how little he had, he took credit to himself for having done even so much. It did not occur to him that the money might have been more usefully spent, and more kindly, on helping his people to help themselves, than on the care of decorative shrubs.

Beyond this belt of beauty he saw nothing to reassure him. All about the lovely land, so rich in possibilities, so barren of produce—a land that might have been keeping hundreds of families in health and comfort, in that something even which is above comfort, which allows leisure for the higher delights, the social graces wherein lies the charm of life—this once populous countryside lay for the most part idle, silent, deserted; its people scattered to the ends of the earth, forgotten but not forgetful of the homeland which had cast them out. Many of the farms and cottages were empty, some in ruins, all more or less poverty-stricken; and everywhere, in pathetic touches, there were signs of the slow oncoming and desolation of a sure decline from prosperity and usefulness into a hopeless state of neglect—hopeless, that is to say, so long as its condition was to be determined by a decadent, incapable owner, held in bondage by the mass of antiquated prejudices to which he clung with all the resolution he ever showed.

"Where's your groom—where's Brown?" the squire asked suddenly. "Wasn't he with you to-day?"

"Ye-yes," she answered hesitating, and looking about her vaguely, as if she expected to discover Brown in the hedges; "but I seem to have mislaid him."

The squire, suspecting mischief, looked about him too, but he said no more on the subject, and, beyond this, they scarcely exchanged a word from the time they set off until they arrived at the grazing lands, a tract which had been gradually extended by fields gone out of cultivation, and left to lay themselves down in permanent pasture, of the scantiest, for want of tendance. The sheltering hedgerows here, lovely in their wild luxuriance, were a delight to the eye, so long as the eye sought nothing but the beauty of wild luxuriance; but a thoughtful spectator, looking beyond the hedgerows into the fields would

have found the picture unsatisfying because incomplete. There was nothing for the hedgerows to shelter; the purpose of their existence had ceased to be.

Lena looked about her critically. The love of the land was in her blood, and the dismal poverty of these bare fields affected her spirits. For the purpose of shaking off the influence, she made a poor effort to jest.

"Good grazing ground for donkeys!" she remarked.

The squire raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Won't they grow anything but thistles, these fields?" she asked in explanation.

"Yes, my dear," he answered drily, "if you have the capital to put something else into them. There's a vulgar saying that money breeds money."

"But a little can be made to go a long way," she rejoined. "Look at Adnam Pratt! In another year or two he will be clearing six hundred pounds an acre on his twelve acres, he expects. Why don't you turn the Blond Beast—" She pulled herself up. "Why don't you make your son work too?"

"He's in a different position," the squire answered, "and he's in a profession suitable to his position. A man can do nothing better than prepare himself to fight for his country, and die for it if necessary."

"Is that what he's doing?" said Lena, with a little sideway inclination of her head to punctuate the observation. "But when he comes into the property, how will he manage if he has not been trained practically——?"

"The landowner's business is to order, to administer," the squire replied. "It is the same in the army. The colonel orders the manœuvres, the men execute them."

"Yes, but hasn't the colonel been drilled himself? Doesn't he know practically what the men have to do?"

"Of course," said the squire, missing the point.

Lena did not press it; she was content to have made it. She was only beginning to think on these subjects at all, and had been asking for information. What she gathered confirmed her suspicion that the squire's comprehension of what was required of him by his position was faulty in some important particulars. Only ignorance and incompetency could have ordered all these valuable acres out of cultivation.

"There's a man in Denmark who's clearing twenty thousand a year on seven thousand acres," she observed, *à propos* to her own thoughts.

"Is there!" the squire rejoined sceptically; "it must be in francs then."

"No, in pounds," she answered. "Emery Pratt says so. He told my father. I was there."

"Then the land and the climate must be very different from this," he objected.

"Not so good, he said. It's some superior system of cultivation they have there that answers so splendidly."

"It wouldn't do here," he asserted, dogmatically. "The conditions are altogether different."

He turned into a narrow lane as he spoke, and led the way to a farmhouse which stood at the end of it. It was one of the dairy farms mentioned in the Sanitary Inspector's report, and he had come to see for himself how these fellows exaggerate. But there was no exaggeration here. As they approached the rear of the farm, the horses sank over their fetlocks in a quagmire as extensive and filthy as the description had indicated. The squire hastily turned and rode back, followed by Lena holding her nose.

"They ought to clean it up, surely!" she exclaimed, when it was once more safe to breathe freely. "Why don't you make them?"

"Ay, that's just it!" he answered bitterly. "They ought to clean it up. Of course, it's their business. And they want to make me do it! If I did, these Radical fellows would be down on me like a shot for pauperising the people or interfering with the liberty of the subject, or some such damned rot—I beg your pardon, my dear."

"Oh, I don't mind," she assured him. "I'm my father's daughter, you know. But as administrator, why don't you give the word of command?" She ventured this with a sidelong glance at him to see how he took it, but the allusion escaped him.

"You'd know," he said, "if you were me. Let's get on."

They whipped up their horses and rode on briskly under the lowering sky into Pointz. So far they had not seen a soul, but there were a few people about in the long straggling vil-

lage street, and the news of their coming got wind at once, and brought others to the doors of their cottages. The greetings the squire received were sullenly respectful, but Lena was recognised with smiles by every one.

"That you, Miss Kedlock? Hope I sees you well?" said one good wife, coming out into the road.

Lena pulled up. "How's the baby, Mrs. Charley?" she asked.

"Fine! He do thrive on that stuff you gave him."

"Got plenty still?"

"Yes, thank you kindly, miss."

"That's all right."

Lena would have ridden on, but the woman had come between the two horses, and had hold of a stirrup of each. She was a big kindly looking woman, with a determined face, one to make the most of her opportunities. Having had her say out with the young lady, she turned to the squire.

"I'm glad to see you, sir," she began. "Now, perhaps, something'll be done. We've spoke and spoke to Mr. Clutterbuck, and he said he'd tell you, but nothing's come of it. We're all in the same boat here in the village. Will you please to get down and see for yourself? If you'd walk into my cottage, you'd see for yourself I'm not complainin' for nawthing——"

There was a little crowd, mostly of women with infants in their arms, old men, and some few younger ones, who looked as if they had just risen from sick beds, gathered about the horses by this time. A murmur of "That's so, Mrs. Charley," uprose from the group at this point.

"There's sickness and sorrow here, squire, if you'll believe me, sir," she went on, "and nothing done. Those as were able 'ave gone off to the towns, but we can't all; an' those on us as are left an' must stay, find it terrible 'ard. Miss Kedlock can tell you. But come in, sir, and see fur yerself. We knowed if you'd come yerself things ud be very different. Not but what your lady's kind with flannel petticoats and physic, but I ask you, sir, will flannel petticoats keep the rain out?"

The squire had slowly dismounted while she was speaking, and, giving his reins to the first hand held out for them, which happened to be a woman's, followed her into the cottage. In

a few minutes he reappeared, and, still pioneered by Mrs. Charley, entered the next, and so on until he had inspected every hovel in the village, the people following in silence. When he returned to where Lena was awaiting him on horseback, his face looked haggard and grey. He did not speak until he had remounted, then, addressing the people collectively, he asked:

"Can any of you tell me what repairs were done here last spring?"

There was some little hesitation, then a middle-aged man, evidently in ill health, took off his cap and answered: "I've been down wi' the fever off an' on these two year, squire, an' there's bin no repairs done since afore I was took bad, or I'd 'ave knowed it."

The look that the squire cast up at the sky had the effect of an expletive on Lena; the people scarcely understood it. No suspicion was abroad that money raised for their benefit had been misappropriated; but Lena had gathered as much from what Mrs. Pointz had let fall in her rage, and could appreciate the squire's feelings now that he could no longer doubt the truth.

"Thank you," was all he said. "You can trust me. I'll see to this myself. Come, Lena!"

The people raised a faint cheer as they rode away. At some distance beyond the village, a good wife came running out of her cottage to catch the squire with her complaints, but forgot them in her pleasure at seeing Miss Kedlock, who pulled up to speak to her. The squire rode on. When Lena overtook him again, he remarked that she seemed to know everybody.

"Pretty nearly, I should think," she answered indifferently. "I'm all over the place, you know."

"And are popular, apparently," he said.

"Bound to be," she replied. "Nobody's enemy but his own always is."

He looked at her from under his grey eyebrows thoughtfully.

"Why are you so naughty, Lena?" he said; "you who are really so good—so very good and kind."

"Whatever I am is in my 'make up,'" she replied. "Good or bad, I ought neither to be praised nor blamed. I'm my

father's daughter; you've told me so yourself a hundred times."

Colonel Kedlock stood out clear in the squire's mind for a moment, and involuntarily he shook his head. He well knew the tendencies likely to be inherited by daughters of Colonel Kedlocks. But what he said was: "Nonsense. Your father's a gentleman. You can't do better than have a gentleman for a father."

"It depends on the sort of gentleman," she rejoined. "There seems to be a fine variety. Gentleman is a generic term which implies air and tone and manner, of a certain quality. Given these distinctions, the man may be good, bad, or indifferent, a rogue or a saint—he is still a gentleman."

The squire was silent for a little, then he said: "It is not becoming for children to sit in judgment on their parents."

"But it may be wise," she retorted. "I believe in facing the truth myself——"

"For a good purpose, it is to be hoped," he supplemented. "If you only face the truth, as you call it, for the sake of finding an excuse for your own misconduct, it won't do you much good; but if you face it in order to guard against any bad tendency that you may have inherited, why then you do well. And we all inherit bad tendencies of some sort or other. The thing is to conquer them. You can't be doomed by heredity if you won't. Only the coward accepts his doom; the brave man resists it. I knew a young fellow whose father was a drunkard, and he began to have a taste for liquor himself. What did he do? He swore off alcohol in every shape and form, and became a very fine fellow. You're as clever as a monkey, and you've pluck enough for anything. I don't say you've any bad tendency, but if you think you have, fight it."

"If I could make myself want to fight it!" she exclaimed. "But that is the curse of it, Nunc dear. The mischief in me will out because it is a delight to me. I'm a born *fille de joie*——"

"Without having the slightest idea of what that means!" he chuckled, reassured by what he mistook for a naïve proof of proper ignorance. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, and her lips twitched suspiciously; but she said nothing. It pleased her to see him pleased. They were at their best with each other, these two, there being genuine affection between

them, the one factor that brings out and keeps uppermost the best in everybody.

They were nearing Pratt's Place by this time. On their right, ragged hedges, broken down fences, and gates dropping dejectedly from their hinges, bore witness to the squire's indigence. On their left, Emery Pratt's prosperity was made apparent by perfect order and trimness in every particular.

"Pratt's Place makes me think of the flag that braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze," Lena remarked.

"Yes," said the squire, with a sigh. "It looks like lasting. It's good stock, that old yeoman breed—backbone of the country, and all that sort of thing. Emery made a mistake in his first wife and Seraph's a bit of a weed, but Adnam shows breeding——"

"But why aren't we, with all our advantages, backbone of the country too?" Lena asked.

"You can't have two backbones, my dear," said the squire. "Ours is another function. We are the nerve, the governing power. We keep the kingdom together. Without us it would have gone to pieces long ago."

"Ah!" she ejaculated ambiguously. "It's wonderful. There's Algernon now—with his cricket, polo, hunting, shooting, making love; and his military duties, of course; one might suppose he would have no time to learn anything else—yet, of course, when the moment comes, he will be found fit to govern like the rest of you. It is wonderful."

The squire's face clouded, but she gave him no time to speak.

"Seraph Pratt may be a weed," she rattled on, "but he does know his own business. They say there's no better farmer in the county. It's with men as it is with plants, isn't it? Some weeds may be developed by cultivation into fine flowers; while some flowers, because they have been neglected in important particulars, rapidly degenerate into unlovely weeds. Who are those men?"

The road was straight here, and far down it a horseman could be seen talking to another man, who was standing with his back to a gate. Before they could make them out, the horseman had ridden on, but as they approached they recognised old Emery at the gate. He had turned and was leaning

on the gate, looking out over the field beyond. Hearing the horses, he turned again to see who was coming, and took off his hat to the young lady. She saluted him with: "What—

*' . . . looking on the pleasant autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more? '*"

"Thinking of catch crops, Miss Lena," he replied, with a broad smile.

"Who was that you were talking to—the man on the horse?" she asked eagerly.

"My son—Adnam. He's exercising one of my——"

But Lena was off down the road, helter-skelter after Adnam, before he could say "hunters."

Old Emery leant back against the gate and laughed his jolly hearty laugh, and even the squire's sombre face relaxed into a momentary smile.

"She's a rare one after the boys," old Emery said, when he had recovered himself. "But there's no harm in that," he added tolerantly.

"I don't know," the squire rejoined, shaking his head. "I don't know." He looked after her, but she had already disappeared round a bend in the road.

"Adnam will see she's all right," old Emery remarked consolingly, divining his thought. "And, any way, you'd never overtake her now."

The squire resigned himself, with the remark that she was a troublesome, wild girl. Old Emery opined that she was wild, but excused her on the score that it was the nature of young fillies so to be, and good too, as a sign of spirit, so long as there was no vice in it.

"So long as there's no vice in it," the squire repeated dubiously. "But she'll be all right with Adnam," he added, washing his hands of the responsibility. "You're lucky in your sons, Pratt," he remarked.

"Ay, and more than lucky," old Emery answered with satisfied pride. "Adnam's as straight as a die, and, for work, I guess he'll do. He's made a fine start, at all events. As to Seraph, he puts his head and his heart into his work too. No man could do better by the land than he will when he comes into it."

"I wish I could say as much for my son," the squire rejoined despondently. He waited for a reply, but as Emery was silent, he remarked, "You don't encourage me, neighbour!"

"Well, squire," old Emery answered reluctantly, "I don't know what to say. Our points of view are so different."

"I suppose you think it was fool nonsense letting my son go into the army? He should have been learning his 'business,' eh?" the squire snapped, bitterly scornful of the word "business" as applied to the functions of a landowner.

"There's no knowing," old Emery answered temperately. "You must consider a lad's vocation. If you put the wrong horse to the plough, you spoil both the horse and the furrow. Teach a lad from the first that

*"All play and no toil
Makes a man the devil's spoil,"*

and, unless he comes of a bad idle stock, he'll turn out well in the end. I own I was disheartened about Adnam. He was twenty-one before he set to work regularly. I didn't grasp that he'd got his ideas all the time, and was preparing himself with his books, and I own I hadn't much faith in his experiment; but, Lord! you should see what he's doing now!"

"He had it in him," said the squire.

"Yes, he had it in him right enough," Emery agreed; "but it had to be brought out, and it was his mother did that."

"His mother, ah!" The squire's face clouded. If Algernon had had such a mother the prospects of the whole family would have been very different that day. If he had had such a mother himself—? But his mother came of those bygone gentry who so arranged the lives of their women that the only way to escape being a fool was to become a firebrand, and she had not been a firebrand. In a state of deep despondency, a man is apt to see himself as others see him, for a brief moment. The squire had such a moment now. "I suppose you think that if I had been brought up as you were, my fields would have been as fat to-day?" he said.

"It's a business, landowning, from my point of view," Emery observed, with a sidelong nod towards his own possessions.

"Business!" the squire ejaculated. "The very word is taboo among us. In my young days a landowner of my class was supposed to have no vulgar business. We attended to nothing but such honouring offices as became our position and added to our dignity. We had subordinates to see to everything else."

"I've thought it a pity," old Emery acknowledged. "Pointz might have been a fine property—it might still," he hastened to add by way of encouragement.

"Not in our hands," the squire objected gloomily. "The brains have been bred out of us or fooled away."

Old Emery forebore to comment. He turned his head and stood for a little looking out over his own fields as a sea-captain scans the sea.

"There's generally a way to set things right, squire," he said at last, "once we know why they've gone wrong."

This reminded the squire. "In my own case I've just got a clue," he burst out. "What do you think of Clutterbuck? You'd do me a kindness if you'd tell me frankly."

"Well, I'll tell you this, squire, to oblige you," old Emery answered deliberately. "I'd not employ Clutterbuck myself to sweep my stable yard if there wasn't another man to be had."

The squire nodded grimly. "Thank you," he said. His horse, impatient of the long halt, began to sidle away. He pulled him up to the gate again. "There's a lot to be looked into," he said, "and I don't know where to begin—except with Clutterbuck. I've done with him."

"You'd like to have things straight for another man when you get one?" Emery suggested.

"I would," said the squire.

"If we could help—" old Emery began. "Perhaps you wouldn't care about it? But Seraph has the best head for unravelling a muddle that I know. He helped Colonel Kedlock out of a mess the other day—that's between ourselves. No fault of the colonel's; only an oversight. And if he could be of any use to you, I'll answer for it he'd be pleased."

"I accept your offer gratefully," the squire answered. "If Seraph could spare me the time, I'd make it worth his while, of course."

"You can easily do that!" Emery assured him, and then,

much to the squire's surprise, he burst out into one of his gigantic fits of laughter. "Don't offer him money or you'll offend him for life," he warned the squire. "If it's lunch time, just ask him in to lunch"—and again he laughed.

The squire thought his laughter irrelevant if not unseemly. If Seraph Pratt were ambitious to be received on an equal footing at Pointz, what was there ludicrous in that? Any young man in his position would naturally wish it, and under the circumstances there could be no objection in his case, respectably connected as he was and of good character himself. The squire saw nothing in it but a satisfactory and possible way to ease himself of an obligation; neither did Emery Pratt for that matter. He had as little suspicion as the squire himself that Seraph had projects with regard to Pointz which nothing could better have helped to further than this unexpected opportunity of obtaining a footing in the house.

Just as he was turning to go, the squire remembered another question he wanted to ask.

"By the way," he said, "you've a man called Mickleham at your place. Who is he? He has an unusual knowledge of art for a workman."

The question had a curious effect on Emery. His fine intelligent face, beaming with interest and sympathy the moment before, suddenly became vacant, as if he had been asked about something he did not understand.

"Mickleham?" he repeated, looking round vaguely. "One of Adnam's men? Little chap?—yes. Judge of pictures, is he? I'm not surprised. He's a musician too. Plays the fiddle when he chooses, admirably; and knows as much about intensive culture, I do think, as any man alive. He's been coaching Adnam all the time, and the queer thing about it is, he has such a way of effacing himself that the lad doesn't realise that he's helped him at all. He's a character, a kind of Enquire-within-upon-everything; but he does nothing for himself with the knowledge he contains. He's like a book, you know, which is always only a book whatever the contents may do for you. An Odd Volume, I should say, squire. You've met some such in your time, no doubt. There are specimens in all classes."

The squire, rather thinking that he had met some such, began to ransack his memory to find one, as proof that he deserved the implication; but the only purpose the effort served was to detach his mind from the primary object of his inquiry, and leave him unaware at the time that his question had been evaded.

Just as they were separating, a haggard elderly groom on a sweating hackney rode up and touched his hat to the squire, who recognised him as the old family servant whom the duchess insisted on sending out—at the peril of his life, some said—as escort to Miss Kedlock.

“Beg pardon, sir,” he said, “but have you seen my young lady?”

“She’s just ridden on ahead—on the way home,” said the squire. “But why did you leave her?”

“I didn’t leave her, sir,” the man answered ruefully, “she left me. She rode off with me this morning like a lamb, sir, so mild and pretty, sir, an’ I ses to myself, ‘This is too good to be true.’ An’ sure ’nough w’en we was well away, she ses to me, ‘Brownie’—that’s wot she calls me, sir, pertic’larly w’en she’s something on—‘Brownie,’ she ses, ‘I’m tired of you.’ ‘Miss,’ I ses, ‘I’ve got my orders.’ ‘I know,’ she ses. ‘Do your duty, Brownie. Keep me in sight—if you can,’ she ses; ‘but I want to play this morning,’ she ses. ‘Let’s have a game at hide-and-seek.’ ‘On horseback, miss,’ I ses, ‘that ud be a funny game!’ ‘It would, Brownie,’ she ses, ‘that’s why I’m going to play at it. I’m young, you see,’ she ses. ‘I must have fun. It’s my due.’ And with that she puts ’er ’orse at a fence and over it like a bird. She do take ’em beautiful, there’s none can touch ’er!” Brown broke off to comment with pride. It was evident that her prowess at the fences wiped out all her sins. “An’ I taught ’er myself—to be the plague of my life, begging your pardon, sir.”

The squire, enjoying the recital, had let him run on, and Emery Pratt was listening also, on the broad grin.

“Wot could I do, sir?” Brown asked pathetically. “I couldn’t follow ’er ’cross country on this ’ere ’ackney, nor on nothing else, fur the matter of that, at my time of life. I made fur the point where I thought she’d land out on the road again, but w’en I got there, I ’eard she’d passed; an’ it’s

been 'ide-and-seek as you may say all day, sir, 'earing of 'er 'ere and 'earing of 'er there, an' finding 'er nowhere. W'en at long last I got to the Hall, she'd gone off with you, sir, an' no one knew which way. Then I got a false scent after a lady and gen'elman as took me miles out of my way, an' they strangers w'en I come up with 'em. Last I got on your track at Pointz—an' now I missed 'er!"

He muttered something by way of Amen that set old Emery roaring, and even tickled the squire.

"She's on ahead now, at any rate," he said.

"Thankee, sir."

Brown touched his hat, whipped up his jaded horse, and resumed his weary quest.

"She's a pickle, that one!" old Emery exclaimed admiringly.

"She is," the squire sombrely agreed, "and they do no good, that kind. She'll get old Brown into trouble, and it's a shame. She deserves to be whipped."

"No, she'll not get Brown into trouble. She'll steer clear of that, or I don't know her," old Emery confidently opined.

And he was right. From the Castle the duchess beheld Lena in the gloaming returning, with her elderly escort—"the perfectly reliable Brown"—a few yards behind her, an edifying picture of propriety.

Mrs. Pointz had, in the meantime, been in close consultation with Algernon. She believed in Algernon. He was the joy of her heart. He was such a fine man, so different from his father, so "aristocratic"—according to her standard—in character and taste; a veritable young blood, having his fling as he should, a "fling" being the special privilege of young men of his station. In that way the governing class see life in their youth, and become men of the world. His father was a failure, therefore it was good that Algernon should be the opposite of his father in everything; only so could he be a worthy representative of the noble leisure class.

On this occasion, Algernon advised her to conciliate. "Dress yourself up, mater, and be just as usual," he urged. "Meet him when he comes in as if nothing had happened. He'll be only too glad if you do. Men hate rows."

"It was he made the row," Mrs. Pointz reminded him bitterly.

"That's different," Algernon decided with a lordly air, as if a row were only objectionable when a woman made it. "He won't keep it up, men don't. He'll be glad enough to have it over and done with."

Accordingly the squire, going into the library on his return, with his hat still on and his riding whip in his hand, found Mrs. Pointz beautifully attired for her, and looking unusually attractive in consequence, lolling at ease in an arm-chair, calmly reading the *Times*. She rose to meet him with a smile, and the evident intention of bestowing upon him the kiss of peace; but the squire parried the attack with his whip, as he might have warded off an inconvenient demonstration of affection from an importunate dog, and she fell back repulsed.

"No more of that," he said, in a quietly cutting tone. "I have been to the village. I know how you have deceived me."

Expecting to find him "just as usual," she was unprepared for this reception, and the shock of it unnerved her. "I never deceived you," she protested feebly.

"I don't know what you call it," he replied. "You conspired with a common man to misappropriate my money, to cheat me——"

"Appleton, consider!" she burst in, clasping her hands. "A mother's feelings, Appleton! I only borrowed the money. It was for my son."

"It was to pay for your son's vices," he retorted, "and you would do it again."

"Never! never!" she exclaimed.

"You would do it again," he went on implacably, "if you had the chance. You will never have the chance."

"Oh, Appleton!" she cried, clasping and unclasping her hands over and over again in protest.

The squire looked taken aback for a moment, then he laughed. He laid his hat and whip aside, went to his writing-table, sat down, and laughed! The naïve self-betrayal of his lady appealed to his sense of humour truly as nothing else had ever appealed to it; but his laughter was of a perverted kind, there was no mirth in it; and laughter without mirth in it is

like sugar without sweetness, a shock to the palate. As suddenly as it had begun his unpleasant laughter ceased. He rested his forearms on the table in front of him, leaned forward and looked at her as she stood before him. Just so, as a magistrate, he would have inspected a prisoner brought up for some offence against decency, his disgust as a man only half hidden by the self-restraint imposed by his office; and it was a magistrate, who appreciates that he is not there to show feeling but to administer the law, that he made an effort to speak without feeling, judicially.

"I cannot prosecute Clutterbuck without exposing you," he said, "therefore I must let the scoundrel off. But he shall go; and I shall not conceal the reason for which I have dismissed him—peculation." He paused for the word to take effect. "Henceforth," he pursued, "you shall meddle no more in my affairs. Nor will I speak to you or hold any communication with you that is not absolutely necessary to keep up appearances for the sake of the family. I will not disgrace you, but I will not forgive you. You can keep the rooms you are in. I shall have my own, which I forbid you to enter on any pretext whatever. There shall be no intercourse between us except in public. This is my final decision."

Mrs. Pointz cowered. She tried to speak, but only gasped, and stared at him, as at something that filled her with horror. In the interval he noticed that she had adorned herself specially for the interview. This feminine wile was revolting to him under the circumstances, yet at the same time he was faintly amused by the discovery that there was coquetry still in this gaunt elderly woman; that she still had faith in her power to allure. It was so like a woman, so silly, vain and weak, not to know that age had disarmed her physically; so like Mrs. Pointz never to have known that charm and all that charm implies, qualities which she had never cultivated, is the one attraction that endures—to the brink of the grave and beyond. Ursula Pratt came into his mind when he thought of charm, and his face softened. Mrs. Pointz mistook the change for a sign of relenting, and recovered herself.

"Do me one favour," she begged. "Let Algernon speak to you." His thoughts wandered back to her slowly.

"Algernon?" he queried; then in an instant he was the

magistrate on the Bench again, with a prisoner before him. "Algernon was doubtless at the bottom of this fraud," he said. "He put you up to it."

The mother's courage in defence of her offspring revived at this: "No, *no*, *no*!" she exclaimed.

He looked at her contemptuously. "I suppose your only son—admirable specimen of a mother's influence—has come to-day on another marauding expedition?"

"He has come—he has a plan—oh, *do* let me tell you!"

"I have no doubt," he said, "but his plans are nothing to me. I would advise him to keep out of my way at present. It would also be fair to remind him that the property is not entailed."

She threw up her hands with a cry upon that. "Oh!" she shrieked, "you would never disinherit him!"

"Wouldn't I!" he said dourly.

He unlocked a drawer of his writing-table, took out a legal-looking document, compressed his lips for the effort, and tore the tough paper into fragments, which he threw into the fire. Mrs. Pointz looked on, paralysed with horror.

"There!" he said. "That was my will." He stood up. "This property has been handed down from father to son for hundreds of years," he went on impressively. "And from father to son so far we have been honourable men. Each in his turn has kept the property together, considering that he held it in trust for the next generation. Even I have kept it together." The break in his voice here well expressed the deep dissatisfaction with himself under which he was labouring. "I won't say that I have done my best. I might have done better if"—he might have said if he had been better taught, but he had not realised the real reason of his failure—"but for the times—" Emery Pratt's fat acres came to mind, and he stopped in doubt. "I won't go into that, however," he broke off. "The reason doesn't matter now. It's the fact I have to face, the fact that I might have done better. I may repair that error yet, and I may make bad worse; but there is one thing that I can be trusted not to do. I will not betray Pointz. I will not hand the property on to one with no sense of honour to make him respect the rights of the next generation. It shall go to the member of my family who has this

sense of honour—to my son if he develops it in time; if not, to one of my daughters.”

He rang the bell. “Send Blenkinsop here,” he said to the man who answered it.

Blenkinsop had been his body-servant for twenty years. He came into the room quietly, and stood by the door, with his hands folded and his eyes on his master's face, stolidly awaiting orders.

“You must excuse me this evening,” the squire said to his lady, speaking for the benefit of the servants' hall. “I shall dine here alone. My work is all in arrears, and I must settle down to it now, and allow no interruptions, if it is ever to be done.”

Mrs. Pointz took the cue, of necessity. She was too frightened even for speech and had to nod her acquiescence.

Blenkinsop opened the door for her and bowed her out—out of the room and out of her husband's life for ever.

There was an inner room to the library which the squire sometimes used as a bedroom. He ordered it to be prepared for him now.

After dinner he sent for Miss Pointz and they spent the evening together. She was the only one of the family with whom he had ever been closely in touch, and Mrs. Pointz had always been jealous of her. When Seraph arrived to advise she was present at the consultation, and from that time forward she was her father's aide-de-camp, vice her mother deposed.

CHAPTER XXXI

If it be true, as the sage said, that “a generous and elevated mind is distinguished by nothing more certainly than an eminent curiosity,” then Lena Kedlock was possessed of a mind of the rarest quality, for her curiosity was insatiable. And there was one direction in which it led her incessantly. Ever since the day when Ella Banks had ridden away with Adnam Pratt, she had haunted Red Rose Farm. Her interest in the White Witch never flagged, though it was always baffled. Ella was as inscrutable to Lena as to the rest of the world,

but this made her all the more fascinating. What was her own view of herself? that was the question. To Lena, as to the duke, she appeared to be a jewel in a most incongruous setting.

The first real approach to intimacy between the two girls had been brought about by the disappearance of Emily Ryecote. But for the sorrows of life we should know very little of each other, and that little not the best. Both girls showed to advantage in their disinterested concern for those upon whom this trouble pressed most sorely, and their confidences on the subject showed them to each other in a new light; until then, neither had suspected that the other had a heart.

Weeks passed and nothing had resulted from the inquiries set on foot. Not a trace of the missing girl could be discovered after her gay parting with her own people on the pretence of going to the Castle to work. At last she wrote—from London, but giving no address. She was very sorry if she had caused her dear parents any anxiety, but she really could not stand the life at home, it was so miserably dull, and it was not her fault that she was not like Alice, who never pined for more room to move. And her dear parents would see that she was right to go, for she had got a fine position in London, with a good salary, and nothing to do but to put on the loveliest clothes, and show them off. And she sent her dear parents a five pound note to show them how well she was doing for herself and to make them quite happy about her.

Her mother was elated by the news. "It's one o' them big shops she's in, you may be sure," she said, "like in Closeminster."

"She should have sent her address," said Alice.

"Ay, she should," her mother agreed. "But, there! It's Emily all over to forget! She'll send it next time."

Old Ryecote said never a word. He could not read, but he took the letter and the five pound note and trudged off to the Castle to see the duke, as was proper, his grace having shown great interest in the matter. When old Ryecote returned, he spoke. He carried a sealed envelope in his hand: "This 'ere envelope," he said solemnly, holding it up, "was give me by his grace, who likewise sealed it fur me. Inside is a letter and a five pound note, wot I locks up, not knowin' w're to send 'em back to——"

"Father, don't be 'ard," his wife pleaded, interrupting him. "It's yer own gel, and she's doin' well fur 'erself. Let bygones be bygones."

"I don't blame," he went on sternly, "an' I don't judge, cos why? I don't know. The law ses a man's innercent till 'e's proved guilty, likewise a gel. But until I know the rights o' this matter, I waits. I locks up this 'ere," he shook the letter, "an' I waits. And until I knows the truth in full I forbid you to mention that gel in my 'earin'. I'll not 'ev 'er name spoke in this 'ouse, so I tell you."

The last words were fiercely uttered, and emphasized with his clenched fist.

His wife and daughter bowed their heads submissively, but afterwards, when they were alone together, the mother turned the occasion to account, as careful mothers do, for the benefit of her daughter.

"My gel," she said, "w'en yer 'usband gets on about 'is 'ouse jest 'old yer tongue. The 'ouse is his, there's no sense disputin' it. Wot you wants is to live in it peaceable, an' 'ave yer own way. And yer own way you'll always get wi' a man by 'umouring of him."

Lena took the news to Ella at Red Rose Farm. She had been to the Cot and heard the whole story of the letter first hand from Mrs. Rycote.

"Well, what do you think of it?" she asked Ella, who had listened in silence, and made no comment when all was said.

"Just what her father thinks," Ella answered, "and I am going to do as he is doing. I shall say no more about it."

"How dull!" Lena exclaimed. "I should like to talk it over and over."

"How futile!" said Ella.

One afternoon the following year the two girls were sitting together in the parlour at Red Rose Farm. Summer was on the wane, and autumn was heralding its approach with random touches of gold here and there. Lena's visits were long and Ella was working. She always worked when they were together, first excusing herself on the plea of necessity. There were certain formalities which she never omitted. Formality is a great protection against the encroachments of intimacy,

and she used it with unerring instinct to keep Lena where she preferred that she should remain, at a safe distance. The habit of conforming to petty social restrictions was in Lena's blood, a hereditary instinct, though not in her character, and compelled her to pull herself up involuntarily when Ella used some small item of etiquette to check her too free and easy manner.

Ella ended this visit by rising and putting her work away. "I must ask you to excuse me," she said. "I have to go out."

"Where?" Lena asked.

Ella bridled slightly. "I am going to see Mrs. Pratt," she answered, in a tone that made Lena feel indiscreet.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "The question slipped out unawares."

"No need to apologise," Ella politely assured her, and Lena felt that she had done well to apologise. But she recovered herself, that is to say her characteristic impertinence, the next moment. Ella had crossed the room and was opening the cupboard in the wall in which she kept her work, and Ella, moving, was the poetry of motion, the sublime!

"What a young duchess you are!" Lena exclaimed.

"Is there any peculiarity about young duchesses?" Ella asked. "I have never seen one, but I should have supposed that they were very much like other young women."

Lena felt unaccountably checked. "Ye—yes, I suppose they are," she answered, mentally surveying all the young duchesses she knew. "Therefore I retract, for I can't honestly say that you are like any other young woman I ever saw. There is no comparison. You are unique. Now, don't protest that you are just an ordinary commonplace person——"

"Why should I?" Ella answered. "I know I am not."

"Good Lord!" Lena exclaimed, hugging herself as if she were frozen, "what a cold douche! I don't believe you're a woman at all. You're a witch, a white witch. I told Melton so, and he went off in a huff."

Ella locked the cupboard door and put the key in her pocket, deliberately. She was waiting for more.

"Went to bed, I mean," Lena added upon reflection. "It was my good-bye to him that night before he went abroad. Do you know why they went off like that in such a hurry? I

don't. I wish I did. But when I question *The Word Within*, it answers always: 'Eustace, Ella, Adnam.'

She was looking into Ella's inscrutable face as she spoke, and was aware of a subtle change in it. She was seized with the desire to find out what it meant, and for this purpose she determined to cling to Ella.

"Let me go with you, Ella?" she pleaded. "I adore Mrs. Pratt."

"If you like," Ella answered. Her hat was lying on the table. She put it on, took up a little parcel of books, and was ready. Lena had ridden over, and Brown was waiting below in the road with the horses.

"How are we to go?" she said, stopping in the porch to consider. "Will you ride behind Brown?"

"No, thank you," Ella answered, with the least little curl of her lip.

"Hoity-toity, eh?" Lena laughed. "Brown isn't Adnam! You would not relish such close proximity to Brown?"

"I should not," was the decided reply.

"But you didn't mind Adnam? The difference is great, I acknowledge. Did you ever kiss Adnam?"

Ella relaxed. "No. Did you?"

"Only once." She reflected a moment, then added with a twinkle: "His fault, though; I'm not to blame. By the way, are *you* in love with Adnam?"

"Not the least in the world," Ella answered. "Are you?"

"Yes. But not with him in particular. I am just as much in love with Vincent Blatchford when I am with him. Of course if the two were together I should prefer Adnam. But I am always in love. I always have been. Not with every one, though, indiscriminately. The Blond Beast repels me. Isn't he a beast?"

"He is," said Ella.

"But I was telling you," Lena recommenced, then broke off. "Am I boring you?"

"Not in the least. You were telling me——"

"That I am always in love with any one who attracts me, except Eustace. I love Eustace. I am not in love with him."

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"Not at all, as I experience it. 'In love' is a feeling in

myself kindled by something I see in a man. It is essentially selfish. I should do nothing for the man that was not a pleasure to myself. Make *me* happy; that is the motto of 'in love.' When a man begs you on his knees to make him happy, fight shy of him; but if he says, 'Let me make you happy,' treat him with respect. I don't want to make Adnam Pratt or Vincent Blatchford happy, I want them to make me happy. 'In love' takes; love gives. That is the difference in my feeling for Eustace. I want to make him happy. Do you understand? There should be a word to express the difference, an irradiating word. I wish I had one!"

"An irradiating word!" Ella said softly to herself. "*Le mot qui grise!*" and she was back at the brook, looking up at the lace-like foliage of the beeches with Melton beside her. "You can give an irradiating sense at all events, you uncanny child. I see what you mean. But you are confusing a lower with a higher feeling, passing pleasures with permanent happiness. Pleasure is a temporary thrill of the senses; happiness a great and lasting uplifting of the soul."

"How do you know?" said Lena, quickly.

Ella laughed: "I don't think I did know until I spoke," she said.

"Ah, then you *are* like me!" Lena exclaimed. "You do say things first and see what they mean afterwards. I'm always doing it, are you?"

"Not that I know of," said Ella. "I like to know what I mean and to say what I mean."

"You like to be safe," said Lena; "objectionable state! So prosaic! I like to feel that anything may happen; that I am on the edge of a precipice."

"You would not if you were there," Ella assured her significantly. "But come, we must hurry. I shall be late."

"I shall walk with you across the fields," Lena decided. "Brownie can take the horses round by the road to Pratt's Place."

They walked on briskly, but in silence, their girlish chatter suspended by the influence of the hour. It was a warm grey day, sunless and windless, a day with a sense of suspense in it, of something threatening, something untoward. It told upon both girls, but differently. Ella's high spirit rose; what-

ever the encounter, she was prepared to resist, to defy. She walked proudly, with her head held high; strong, calm, confident, determined to act for herself, let happen what might. Lena, more emotional, living more in the moment, was constitutionally and literally also ready for anything—ready, that is to say, to get the only good she appreciated out of events, their effect upon her feelings; painful or pleasurable, it did not matter, so that they moved her. Under the influence of this low grey sky, in this brooding atmosphere, her dark eyes dilated expectantly, she delighted in the sensation without defining it. The cry of the curlew came eerily over the desolate flats.

Lena was the first to speak. "Going to see Mrs. Pratt feels very like going to church," she said.

"Oh, do you think so?" Ella exclaimed, deprecating the comparison as uncomplimentary to Mrs. Pratt. "Going to see Mrs. Pratt is a pleasure to me."

"So is going to church—to me," said Lena.

They found Mrs. Pratt in her panelled parlour, sitting, abbess-like, in her high-backed abbess chair. The windows were wide open, and the peculiar fragrance of late summer, heavy with forebodings of decay, filled the room, as with incense, appropriately. Lena was reminded of convent parlours she knew, but here there was an influence far above any she had ever felt in convent parlours. There she had recognised the thing attempted; here she found the thing attained. The saving grace of beauty was absent from the convent parlours. Clean, cold, comfortless, she remembered them, and somewhat tawdry, with whitewash, garish pictures, and cheap images; undignified poverty and makeshift were their chief characteristics. Here the cloistral effect was produced by cloistral plainness, that rich plainness which makes for dignity, purity, and peace. In the dark panelling, in the old carved oak of the furniture, in the few fine pictures, pregnant with symbolism, and illustrative of the taste and attributes of the owner as well as of the subjects they depicted, beauty was honoured as truth, first aid to goodness. And there was never a nun of Lena's acquaintance with a face like Ursula Pratt's, with the power of her personality; the subtle emanation pecu-

liar to the genuine mystic, which made this delicate, ethereal woman strong with the strength that uplifts, that renders effective the most glorious possibility in human nature, the possibility of attaining to the supreme experience implied in love: Union with the Divine.

Ursula received the two girls with impartial cordiality. She had not expected Lena, but she had one of those kind comforting faces from which there shines upon us all the excuses we make for ourselves, and Lena felt welcome.

"We walked here together and talked," Lena said. "We talked about love and religion, rather a medley."

"How so?" Ursula asked smiling. "Surely there is no such thing as religion without love, or love without religion."

"I don't know," Lena answered easily, evading the direct issue. "But we did rather muddle up the subjects; didn't we, Ella?"

"You touched on a fine variety," said Ella; "but I don't remember that religion was one of them. Happiness——"

"By the way, yes," Lena interrupted. "How do you define happiness, Mrs. Pratt?"

Mrs. Pratt was sure of her definition, and repeated it. "Happiness," she answered—"happiness is a condition in ourselves, the outcome of devotion to something better than ourselves."

Lena looked out through the open window at the evening sky. Her dark eyes glowed.

"Art appeals to me more than religion," Ella said. "Art does not brutalise as religion so often does. There are no hideous cruelties, persecutions, torturings, burnings, injustices of every kind, to be laid to the score of art as there are to the discredit of religion."

"I fancy a good deal of heartburning and bitterness might be laid to the score of art," Ursula answered smiling. "But neither religion nor art should be held responsible for the evil done in their name. Personally I cannot see any good in art except as a means to an end. To make art the great object of life is like trying to live on the *hors d'œuvres* handed round as an introduction to dinner. They are delicious, and wholesome, too, I dare say, in their proper proportion and place; but the body must have a mixed diet to live on, or it loses

its health, and so does the mind. A variety of good solid food is essential to the well-being of both. When you spoke of love, Lena, you were thinking of our love for each other. That is only an introduction to love. You love a human being, and call the experience a glimpse of heaven; if you looked up to Love itself and loved, you would be in heaven. You would be in love all the time, and have your love returned; no higher bliss is possible. We know it when we meet those rare beings who are in love with Love Divine, and see the rapture in their faces; the chosen few who impress us as apart, whom we see to be radiant, of whom we are reduced to say simply, because the thing we want to say is so immeasurable, words fail to express it,—‘They are happy!’”

“You beautiful abstraction!” Lena exclaimed. “I see what you mean. The conception is gorgeous—heaven upon earth, the kingdom of heaven within us—and all expressed by one simple word: happiness! But to attain to it, that is not a simple thing!”

“We cannot reason our way in spiritual matters; we must feel it,” Ursula answered. “How feel it? By keeping our minds in the right attitude, our first care being to suppress our pride of intellect. Love is the food of the spirit. You must want God thirstily. You must experience Him in the sense of exaltation, in rapture, in an ecstasy of love.”

“By fasting, by prayer,” Lena reflected aloud. “Do you believe that physical suffering encourages spiritual growth?”

“Yes and no,” Ursula answered. “It depends on the nature of the sufferer and the source of the suffering. There is great confusion of mind on that subject. Teachers of religion observe every day that character is strengthened and souls are sanctified by suffering, therefore they prescribe pains and penances. The mistake is to prescribe. There is a form of abstinence that helps, and self-indulgence is fatal; but self-inflicted torments do not develop the best that is in us; on the contrary, they tend to promote self-satisfaction. A dangerous form of pride. The sufferings that save are not artificial; not contrived but experienced. To contrive is to be forewarned and prepared. Penances done to order are done with padded feelings. It is only from Beyond and unexpectedly that the saving sorrows come; and until they come,

there is no presumption in believing that we are not intended to suffer."

"I shudder at the cross," said Ella. "To me it is the repulsive symbol of men's cruelty and injustice."

"I bow to the cross in love and reverence," Ursula said. "To me it is the symbol of God's kinship."

"I kiss the cross!" Lena exclaimed.

"If only you would in spirit and in truth!" Ursula sighed.

"I do! I do!"

"Emotionally."

"Well—yes," she acknowledged. "But you said we should 'feel' our way."

"Spiritually, not sensuously. *Æsthetic* enjoyment is possible without inward spiritual grace."

"That's a blow," said Lena. "I did think my religion good of its kind."

"You are training yourself to live on your emotions—dangerous always; in your case likely to be disastrous."

"Why in my case particularly?" Lena asked.

Ursula looked into the world, where so many beautiful souls, imprisoned in corrupt bodies by heredity, wage war with the flesh.

"Dear child," she said, "I wish I could help you!"

Lena shivered. "You foresee sorrow for me then?" she said.

"You can save yourself."

"How?" Lena asked eagerly.

"By resistance." Ursula stopped short. She saw the dawn of comprehension in Lena's dark eyes. "Map out your own nature, and mark the dangerous places, the rocks and shoals that you must avoid. Don't drift. Steer straight for the Happy Haven—you know the way. You know, too, where you are apt to go wrong."

"I suppose I'm too light," said Lena. "I'm apt to capsize. I must lay in ballast——"

"Ballast is not worth much," Ursula interrupted. "What you want is a valuable cargo—ideas, opinions, principles——"

"Come to think of it," Lena burst in, much interested in her own case, "I have a collection of ideas, opinions, principles."

"Act on them then," said Ursula.

"I do," Lena answered; "but they all contradict each other, and any one of them, when I happen to think of it, seems equally good to act upon. I suppose it is so with everybody. Conduct, as I see it, is a strange patchwork."

"It is, if you take your principles haphazard, good and bad, as they come. You must choose them, pick out a few good ones, and act on them whatever happens."

"Counsel of perfection," said Lena, her interest waning as her emotions ceased to be played upon and her mind was made to act. "But what of Ella? What dangers beset her?"

"Yes, tell me, do!" said Ella, and, seeing that Ursula hesitated, she added: "Tell me frankly. It would be a kindness."

"You will have great temptations, my dear," Ursula answered, clasping her hands pitifully; "and the greatest of them all is in yourself; in your pride of intellect, your self-sufficiency. Your weakness is in your strength. If you depend upon that alone, it will betray you."

Ella bent her head by way of thanks, and turned to her books, which lay on the table beside her, as if that ended the matter.

Lena, quick to take a hint, jumped up. "You want to get to work," she said. "I am wasting your time."

"Time spent with Mrs. Pratt is never wasted," Ella answered.

"That was graciously said, my dear," Ursula observed, with a smile and a sigh.

Lena had no sooner left them than a reaction set in. Before she reached the foot of the stairs she was ready for anything in the shape of a new diversion. In the hall she encountered Adnam.

"Adnam!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands. "Dearest dear!"

"You're acting," he said, ignoring the proffered hands. "You're always acting."

"Very badly, then," she sighed, "since I never move you."

"You make me move," he rejoined, preparing to fly.

"In the wrong direction, unfortunately for me." She sighed sentimentally. "How nice you look!"

"I can't return the compliment," he said, affecting distaste. "Girls never look nice in those ridiculous habits."

"You only say that to annoy me, you know," she smiled up at him.

"I don't think enough of you to want to annoy you," he protested, but he looked into her upturned face as he spoke, and caught the glint of sapphire in her dark eyes. The face with its delicate colouring was new to him in that attitude, and it was certainly sweet.

Under cover of this temporary distraction, she was stealing closer, like a cat stalking a bird.

"Bold bad girl, eh?" she smiled up at him again. Her lips were very red, her teeth very white.

"All that," he answered, but he relaxed and smiled, forgetting that he was on guard. Smile answering smile, they looked at each other, then she ventured. With her hands on the lapels of his coat, she sighed: "Adonis!"

"*Backfisch!*" he retorted, but he had lost command of his tone, and the word became a term of endearment as he pronounced it. He had intended to disengage himself; instead he put his arm round her.

Her head dropped on his shoulder. "How nice!" she whispered. "I feel so satisfied! I do love you, Adnam!"

He kissed her forehead.

"You dear!"

He kissed her lips.

"I am sorry I cannot marry you."

There was a pause, then he withdrew his arm, stepped back, and looked at her, wrathfully, his handsome face flushed, his eyes blazing.

"Oh dear, but I'm sorry I can't marry you!" she exclaimed, meaning it at the moment.

But he was not mollified. He felt that he had been made a fool of. Hitherto he had always been on guard against her wiles, but this time he had looked at her and found her good to look at, and as he looked, his guard was lowered. She had beaten him, and he resented it.

"I didn't know that there was any question of marriage between us," he said insultingly.

"Never mind, Adnam," she coaxed. "It was only a game,

dear, an old game that men have always played at, and now we girls have learnt it too. I've won this round; don't be vexed. I played fair; you couldn't think me in earnest. And I have to win my games whatever they are. That's what I am."

"I don't know what you are," said Adnam, looking into the dark eyes wistfully; "but I know what you are not. You are not good. Why, why are you not good?"

"Oh, bother good," she said, "if it isn't good to make you kiss me. But it is good, Adnam." She reflected a moment. "If I were what you call good, I should marry you. I would rather marry you. You are nicer to kiss than Eustace. However, it is Eustace I have to marry."

"Poor Eustace!"

"Yes—poor Eustace; because I shall always be in love with you, when you are anywhere about."

They were interrupted by Seraph, who came sauntering in from the inner hall in riding dress. He was fresh from Pointz, and looked elated, like a man who has just done well and knows it.

Lena, holding out her hand, smiling up at him with eyes and lips, a smile that instantly staggered his allegiance to Godiva Pointz.

"How do you do?" she said. "Where is my horse, I wonder; perhaps you can tell me?"

"He is in the yard. I saw him as I came through," Seraph stammered, in his haste to oblige her.

She looked round: "Which is the way?"

"Let me show you."

They went out together.

"Tricks again," Adnam reflected. "She's always acting."

He threw himself into a chair. He was sore, angry, disgusted—with himself most, but also with her; yet, at the same time, there was a lurking doubt in his mind, a doubt of her sincerity when she spoke of Eustace. That was all acting and nonsense, surely? For answer, there recurred to his mind the whisper: "I do love you, Adnam," and his heart expanded. He recalled that second kiss on her lips, and stopped there. The rest was all nonsense, just her fun; her teasing way, he

decided, but excusable, because she knew that he was not deceived.

Through the open windows there came the sound of horses prancing, carriage wheels crunching the gravel, and a lady's voice airily ordering her carriage back: "I shall not want you again."

The duchess to see his mother. Adnam received her in the inner hall.

"Adnam, dear boy! how are you?" she exclaimed, as if she had not seen him for a year. "Such a big fellow; and so handsome! I used to carry you about when you were a baby-boy, and now you could carry me. Could you?" she peered up at him through her lorgnette, playfully.

Adnam smiled without committing himself, for the little lady though short was solid.

"Your dear mother and I used to say that we had only one baby between us then," she pursued. "Ninian and Eustace seemed such big fellows beside you in long clothes, and now there's no difference." She sighed regretfully for the babies, then burst out, ribbons and lace and little hands all a-flutter: "Eustace has been recalled to his regiment. Ninian is still in Japan. But it cannot be very long now till we have them both at home again." She waved her lorgnette as if she were calling for three cheers; but her inconsequent mind was off in a moment on another tack. "And Ella Banks?" she asked. "Have you seen her lately?"

Adnam had not. He did not know that she was then in the house.

"Beautiful girl, everybody thinks so, don't you know; and extraordinarily clever, they say; so industrious, too, and all that sort of thing. She would make an excellent wife, Adnam, I am sure."

"Would she?" said Adnam politely, offering his arm to take the little lady upstairs.

Opening the door of his mother's room he bowed her in, and the duchess found herself face to face with Ella Banks, who was just coming away. They both stopped short and looked into each other's faces. Ella recovered herself first and made her curtsy—that ambiguous curtsy, which would have done for the curtsy of one great lady to another in bygone days,

but was all wrong somehow—"so assuming"—from a girl in her position to the Duchess of Castlefield Saye, the duchess felt.

"Ella Banks?" she said superciliously, lifting her lorgnette and looking at Ella with distaste.

Ella drew herself up on the defensive. She played the part of haughty lady the more effectively of the two. It was in her nature, and her whole appearance lent itself to that form of expression. The poor little duchess, simple-minded, middle-aged, stoutish and jerky, had no advantage, mental or physical, to enable her to cope at close quarters with this richly endowed young woman; Ella being impervious to the magnetic attraction and hypnotic effect of high social position, which has such paralysing power over the sycophant sort. Never by any one else had the duchess been made to feel her rank of such small account. She stumped past Ella now, on her high heels with her head thrown back, and sat down, forgetting in her irritation to greet her dear Ursula at all. Ella quietly left the room.

Ursula, seeing the little lady obviously upset, asked with concern: "Is anything the matter, dearest?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the impatient answer; "at least, I do—in a way. It's that girl!"

"Ella? Poor child! What has she done?"

"Didn't you see——"

"Nothing unusual. She was a little startled, perhaps, to find herself face to face with you so suddenly."

"Was it only that? Was it only that, do you think?"

"What else could it be?"

"Impertinence," said the duchess.

"Oh, no, impossible!" Ursula smiled. "How could she—why should she be impertinent to you?"

"I ask myself," was the disconsolate answer. "If I knew that, I should understand"—she looked round, leant forward, and dropped her voice—"I should understand why I'm afraid of her. I don't know what it is about her. She makes me feel—feel that there is something wrong. There is something evil about her—no, I don't mean that. I don't mean—well, you know how it is with the evil eye? People may have it and not know that they have it, and if they did know, it would make no difference, for they must look at you all the same, so there you are."

"I see," said Mrs. Pratt. "You think she will cause misfortune involuntarily?"

"That's it!" the duchess exclaimed. "How you do understand, Ursula, and put things! Involuntarily, yes; without intending it."

"Her misfortune as well as yours?"

"Ye-yes. Well, perhaps. Her misfortune as well as ours? I don't know!" Her tongue tripped over the confusion of her mind. She made an effort to disentangle her thoughts: "I don't know anything about middle-class people," she recommenced, "but I have been told that their manners amongst themselves are not proof against the slightest friction; that they show you what they think of you, and whether they like you or not and all that sort of thing, and are only civil when they think they will gain some advantage by knowing you. I once sat next one in a crowd, some charity affair; and of course I began to talk to her as I should have talked to one of ourselves, a stranger. But, O my dear! the cold shoulder! the *hauteur*! the suspicion!—until she knew who I was. And then the abject grovelling! It made me sick. That kind of thing always does—even to think of it. So different with our tenants and people. I love the way they speak to us. It is more like the respect of well-bred children for their elders than anything. There is affection in it, and faith, and the certainty that they won't be snubbed. But with Ella Banks—I can't make it out. She does not mean to claim equality, I suppose!" The little lady threw back her head. "Yet when she says 'your grace,' and makes that wonderful curtsy, there is no real deference in her manner."

"Still I maintain that she is not impertinent," Ursula said. "Ella is never vulgar."

"No," said the duchess sarcastically; "her manner would be perfect—if she were a queen; but on Ella Banks such an air is an anomaly, a mystery. There must be something behind it, some certainty. And, O Ursula! when the boys come home!"

Up to this point Mrs. Pratt had been making light of the matter, but upon this reminder she changed countenance, and for some time she sat deep in thought. At last she said, speak-

ing to herself, rather than to the duchess: "I think the shop in London would be the best thing after all."

Adnam returned to the hall, picked up a newspaper and threw himself into a chair. He was at a loose end. The newspaper did not interest him. Nothing was going on in the Orchard, it was Saturday afternoon. He had been about to exercise one of his father's young hunters, but Lena had put the intention out of his head. What should he do? It was sultry weather; he had been up and at work since daybreak; he began to feel drowsy; his thoughts became a jumble of the little duchess's babble and Lena—what about Lena? How nice her hair smelt! "I feel so satisfied. I do love you, Adnam!" Was it "Adnam" or "Seraph"? Drunk or sober, Seraph was sly, Seraph must be watched. A great deal depended upon keeping him in sight. . . . drunk or . . . sober . . . Lena Kedlock . . . oblivion.

Adnam awoke with a start. Some one had come in from the garden and was crossing the hall . . . one of the men . . . no, Mickleham. Adnam made the distinction without being aware of it, and rose involuntarily.

"Excuse me," said Mickleham, "I am going upstairs."

Adnam resealed himself. Mickleham was going to see his mother, he supposed; it seemed all right. But the duchess was there. Should he have told Mickleham and stopped him? Bother Mickleham! They could send him away if they didn't want him. Why did he stand up when Mickleham came in? He had to shut his eyes to find an answer. With his eyes shut he saw in rapid review every little incident in which Mickleham was concerned since he discovered himself a master of the violin; and as these incidents appeared to Adnam now, he saw that each one of them was a difficulty which Mickleham had helped him to surmount. Mickleham had always been at hand with the knowledge he had lacked. He had never thought of consulting Mickleham, but somehow—how had it happened? Whenever a difficulty arose there was Mickleham, and Mickleham always told him just what he wanted to know—touched on the topic accidentally, as it seemed, and put Adnam right without appearing to advise. Adnam had lately

imported three French gardeners, excellent men. How had he heard of them? Through Mickleham. He would have been stuck but for these gardeners. And his own men whom he had been obliged to dismiss? They had all gone off together one morning in a *char-à-banc*, with three cheers for Mickleham, "For he's a jolly good fellow."

Adnam, occupied with his projects, had not hitherto been nicely observant of people, except in so far as it was necessary to know them for the furtherance of his own interests. In youth itself there is not much depth, and the surface that it sees satisfies its curiosity; but the eyes of the more intelligent are always opened in time, and they make discoveries. Lately Adnam had made several. He had obtained glimpses of Seraph's character which had surprised him; Lena appeared to him now as complexity itself; and Mickleham—what was Mickleham?

Voices. And Mickleham came in from the inner hall, escorting the duchess. They were talking together in German, confidentially. German being as familiar to Adnam's ear as English, it did not strike him as odd that these two should be speaking it together. In his drowsy state no questions are asked; things are taken for granted. Mickleham appeared to be a German, and the fact that he had always hitherto thought of him as an Englishman dropped out of sight.

Adnam was hidden by the high back of the easy-chair in which he was lolling, which was turned towards them as they crossed the hall to the side door. The little duchess was exclaiming that dear Ursula was everything to her, there was nobody like Ursula! And Mickleham answered in grave agreement: "The peasants always said that the Countess Ursula was an angel!"

It seemed to Adnam that he was broad awake in a moment, but there had been an interval, blank to him, during which the side door had shut and opened again. Starting up with the exclamation, "The Countess Ursula!" he found himself face to face with his father, who had just come in.

"What's that you're saying?" old Emery asked sharply.

"Is my mother 'The Countess Ursula?'" Adnam asked point blank.

His father hesitated. "It's an honorary title, lad," he said.

"All the sons and daughters take it. How did you get hold of it?"

"I heard the duchess and Mickleham——"

"You were eavesdropping?" his father demanded.

"I was half asleep in your chair there, and they passed through the hall. The duchess was saying——"

"The duchess, yes," old Emery interrupted dispassionately. "She does chatter." He took a turn up and down the hall, then stopped, looked at Adnam, and said meditatively, "The Countess Ursula Aubon Strelletzen——"

"Aubon Strelletzen!" Adnam caught him up. "That's my name!"

"Yes," his father answered. "You are Adnam Aubon Strelletzen Pratt. But, judging by your appearance, the Strelletzen family might think that the Pratt was irrelevant." He had his hat in his hand, and now put it on, and made for the door. "Yes, she does chatter," he repeated, and went out.

This was the first intimation Adnam had had that his mother was *hochgeboren*.

The duchess parted from Mickleham at the little gate leading into the wood. It was evident that he knew her habits, for he made no attempt to escort her further. She was all a-flutter of excitement.

"It does me good, the silence," she said, glancing along the shadowy path.

"You are not afraid?"

"No, not in the wood," she answered. She made a gesture like a bird about to fly. "I have my moments," she concluded, giving him her hand.

He bent, with uncovered head, and kissed it. She looked up at him wistfully: "I am importunate," she said. "I ask too much."

"It is not that you ask too much," he answered, "but that you ask for the impossible. Perhaps there"—he nodded towards the wood—"among the shadows you will see, in the silence you will hear."

"Oh, if only it might be so!" she exclaimed.

"Be passive," he counselled her.

He held the gate open for her, and, still hat in hand, bowed

low as she passed through. She did not return his bow, she was looking on ahead. With that curious gesture, as of a bird about to fly, she fluttered swiftly along the path and disappeared. He stood looking after her.

They had been sitting in serious conclave, she and he and Ursula. The vague foreboding that weighed upon her, weighed upon them, but no light came. They could think, reason, speculate, anticipate—use their minds freely, but only their minds; the higher power, the power to know, was withdrawn. But she might see for herself. She had her moments, and if she saw for herself, she would also see what they did not see, a way of escape.

It was awesome in the dark depths of the pine woods. Trees and more trees and again trees in procession, in aisles, in avenues, in quincunx, surrounded the little duchess, according as it pleased her to sort them out, in whichever direction she looked. From fairy brakes of yellowy green bracken they shot up, strong, straight, branchless to a great height, and then, with arms extended to each other, they spread and upheld the blue-green canopy with which they separated the brown earth from the grey sky. And all about there were whisperings. From above, as the trees swayed, there sounded the yearning for the ocean of the giant masts that were to be, with foreknowledge and fear of disaster in their sighs; while down below, in the fairy brakes of yellowing bracken, there was an incessant pattering, as of little feet. Out of the corner of her eye the duchess caught the sway here and there of a feathery frond falling back into place; but she was never in time to see the hand that had held it, or the face peering out at her which she knew must be hiding behind it. It was a game of hide-and-seek, and she played it with smiles, for she loved the Little People, and they knew it, and would have helped her if they could.

Deeper into the wood she went alone, yet was never alone. Figures flitted, a transitory incident, among the trees. She saw them and wished them away. She did not want to see or to hear or to think. "Be passive!"—She stopped and shut her eyes, the better to make the effort, but her sense of hearing immediately became abnormally acute. A pine-needle dropping on a frond of bracken made a noise like a bar of iron

let fall on a brick floor, and the padded footfall of a rabbit thudded in her ears like the hoofs of a galloping charger. Then there was a voice—only the voice of the wind; a light breeze that murmured fitfully; then freshened; then spoke out with animation; then, rising to a gale, roared and tossed the trees about with angry gesticulation.

The duchess opened her eyes and was out of the racket. The sunset hush had settled upon the wood. So far as silence can be in such surroundings, silence there was, silence with that undertone of soft, indeterminate sounds, which mark the presence of the silence upon which it rests—as when one says: “How still it is! There are a hundred little noises I never heard before!”

The duchess hurried on, holding her head high like a creature scenting the air inquiringly, and looked about her as if in expectation. She was excited, but in no sense afraid; eager, rather, for whatever might come. And suddenly she was aware of a great black shadow. It stole from under her feet, and crept on in front of her. Beyond was bright sunlight, but the shadow encroached on the sunlight, and stealthily put it out. The duchess stopped. She wanted to see whence the shadow came, but it was as if her neck were stiff; she could not turn it; she had to look on ahead. Up the hill towards the Castle in front of her, the shadow crept, obscuring the earth as a mountainous cloud obscures the sun. It reached the Castle, and touched it, and was not. It had passed in, not on. The great black shadow had come to stay.

The duchess knew what to think of the portent, but the whence of what threatened was still concealed, and it was the whence that the gallant little lady demanded to know.

She could look about her now, and she recognised the spot on which she had been overtaken by Ninian, returning from a ride. She remembered their talk as they walked home together, arm in arm. She was full of fear for him then, and now again she was full of fear for him; and her fear was the same fear.

Suddenly it was borne in upon her that she must go to the duke and explain to him the suspicion by which she was haunted with regard to Ninian and Ella Banks; and she must go at once. But she received the intimation without perceiv-

ing it to be the resolution of her difficulty. No occult experience accompanied it to mark it as all-important, therefore she mistook it for a mere temporary expedient which had occurred to her in the natural course of reflection, and expected at best but a temporary relief from it. The pride which requires a clap and a flash to mark the importance of the revelation vouchsafed is apt to ignore the still small voice. And even the humble mystic does not always know the moment; does not always recognise the right intuition when it comes; it seems so simple.

Believing, therefore, that she was merely acting upon an idea of her own, the duchess hurried on to the Castle; and because of the slight importance she attached to it she missed the essential point. Her loyal little heart shrank from lowering her son in his father's estimation, and she argued herself into the belief that it was right to withhold the suspicion which would have this effect. Why should she explain it to him? It would be enough to get Ella out of the way.

She found the duke in his own room, dozing over a book, and took him unawares. In his drowsy state he had, for once, missed the warning tap-tap of her high heels on the parquet without.

"What? Good gracious!" she exclaimed, putting her arm round his neck. "You doing nothing, hey? You lazy lazy, dearest dear!"

The duke played up to her caress in the most convincing way. "Really I was reading," he said. "But if there is anything I can do for *you*——?" The emphasis he put upon the pronoun made her feel him all her own.

"I only came to speak to you about Ella Banks," she said. "She wants to go to London and have a shop and all that sort of thing, and really she is so clever, they say, it seems a pity to let her be wasted here."

"Ella Banks?" He raised his eyebrows inquiringly, and gained a moment to collect himself.

"Yes. You know. The girl who makes lace," she explained.

"Oh, yes. Old Ellery Banks's— Er, yes. What did you say about her?"

The duchess repeated the proposition.

"Go to London, eh?" he observed. "Rather a fine looking

girl, is she not? Would it be safe—in London alone—a country girl? Great temptations there, you know.”

“Not for good girls,” said the duchess loftily. “The good girls marry.”

The duke seemed to be favourably struck with this assertion.

“Very desirable,” he observed. “Very desirable. But are there no young men here? I thought Adnam Pratt——”

“Adnam Pratt never looks at a girl,” she answered, resenting on behalf of her whole sex this unnatural attitude on the part of a young man.

“Yet I thought you said——” the duke was beginning.

“I was mistaken,” she interrupted curtly.

The duke reflected. “What would you suggest?” he asked finally.

“I should like her to have her shop in London,” she answered. “Ursula approves. I consulted her. The girl has a whole project, and Ursula knows all about it.”

The duke asked no questions, but this did not strike her as singular. She as little expected him to be interested in Ella’s project as she suspected him of already knowing all about it, which was the last thing that would have occurred to her.

“I thought perhaps you might have some suitable premises vacant,” she proceeded.

“Well,” he answered, deliberating, “now you mention it, yes. I believe there is a shop—just off Bond Street. Would that be a good position?”

“Excellent for lace. We all go to Bond Street. Can she have it?”

“So far as I am concerned.” He expressed indifference with a shrug. “It will be your gift, you know, my dear.”

The little duchess almost screamed. “Gift!” she exclaimed, her whole economical soul in revolt. “I could not think of such a thing—such extravagance. These people only appreciate what they pay for.”

“The—er—rents in that neighbourhood are somewhat high,” he ventured to remind her.

“So are her prices,” the little duchess reminded him vindictively.

“Are they?” he replied. “Of course if she makes a great

deal!" Another shrug expressed all that she expected of him. "Is this—er—admirably kind project of yours to be put into effect at once?" he asked.

"If you please," she answered.

"Then if you will just let everybody know that it is you who are setting the young woman up in business, that is all the trouble you need take in the matter."

Her nod of acquiescence did not assure him that she had grasped the full importance of her part of the arrangement.

"You will make it quite clear that it is you who are doing all this for the—er—young woman?" he insisted. "Honour to whom honour is due, you know." He kissed her hand. "You promise me?"

The caress settled the question. She was bound to respond to a wish so expressed, and she left him—satisfied on that score, but perplexed as to how an arrangement could be made which would look like letting a house, and yet have the effect of giving it away.

CHAPTER XXXII

SERAPH PRATT had become all-powerful at Pointz. Ably seconded by Godiva, he had tactfully opposed the feeble suggestion made periodically by the squire that it was time to look out for a new land agent. "Just allow me a little longer, if you please," Seraph would say. He had always something on hand that must be finished first, and always plenty of time. He was in his element. The great property, in his hands, was like a machine which he thoroughly understood and could work to the utmost advantage. Everything favoured him. His father to begin with, whole-heartedly anxious to help his good neighbour the squire out of his difficulties, and also proud of his son's efficiency, made shift to do without him. At the time of his first appearance at Pointz, Mrs. Pointz, deposed and set aside but obstinately determined to regain her ascendancy, had adopted an all-round policy of conciliation which she extended to Seraph for the purpose of showing herself to her husband in an agreeable light, and without a suspicion that Seraph could ever in any way be a danger to herself. She talked a

good deal about "people of that kind," but she was by no means so sensitive to niceties of behaviour as Seraph himself had become under his step-mother's influence. His table manners stood the test of close quarters far better than her own, and it was he who suffered from her habitual conduct in certain particulars of the business in eating. When at last she realised that he had secured a permanent position in the house by the worth of his services to the property, she changed her tactics, but there was no ousting him then. When she was rude and insulting he treated her like a harmless lunatic who must be humoured; and at other times, in imitation of the squire, he set her aside by simply ignoring her.

From the first Seraph had found in Godiva a willing and capable coadjutor. The last worth lingering in decadent families is usually found in the women. Godiva had character and ability enough to manage the property herself, all that she needed was training, and moreover she knew this, and made haste to acquaint Seraph with the fact as soon as he was installed in office. It was over a map of the estate that they became confidential. Godiva was showing Seraph the lie of the land, and pointing to one spot she said: "Clutterbuck advised my father to let these fields lay by themselves down for grazing. He said it would save money."

"It's what Clutterbuck would say," Seraph answered, bending over the map. "Clutterbuck never got any money out of a field that he put into it, I suppose, 'on account of the bad times,'" he pursued meditatively. He looked up at Godiva out of the corner of his eye. He was sitting at the table with the map in front of him, she standing beside him. "Did Clutterbuck ever tell you why the bad times never came to Pratt's Place?"

"Clutterbuck said it was because you had lots of money to put into the land," she answered.

"And at the same time he was telling the squire that there was no money to be made by agriculture! According to that, we must have been burying all that we put into the fields."

"I see," said Godiva.

"My father's theory is that if you put copper into a field properly, you will get silver out of it, and if you put silver in, you'll get gold," Seraph remarked, as he overhauled the map.

"Now this grazing land; I know it. It was to cost nothing, I understand, and bring in a profit. Well, it did."

"No, you are mistaken," said Godiva.

"Excuse me, it is you who are mistaken," he replied. "What profit do you get from nothing?"

"Nothing," she answered, without thinking. Then she laughed. "I see," she said again.

"Grazing lands must be fed if you would have fat cattle," he asserted. "The crop you get from neglected meadows is thistles. There should be good grazing here for hundreds of head of cattle"—he pointed with his pencil to the places as he spoke—"and here on the flats a thousand sheep might be making themselves into the best *press-ally* in the country. If the squire will leave it to me, this shall be a green prairie covered with beasts as soon as grass can be made to grow; and there he shall have his sheep."

"Good," she said simply.

"You believe I can do it?" he smiled up at her.

"I know you can," she answered, "though I don't see how, when my father hasn't even coppers for capital to start you."

"Enough can be raised for a start at small interest on good land like this," he answered. "In a year or two it will be paying cent per cent."

"With luck," she said.

"Providence helps the man who knows his own business and minds it," he answered sententiously. "That's the luck I believe in, the luck I can calculate upon. If the landowners had put a little common sense into their property, we shouldn't have heard all this whining about bad times. Eighty millions of money go out of this country every year for foreign meat, yet our own meat is the best in the world. Why is there so little of it? I've been about the country a bit doing business for my father, and I've seen thousands and thousands of good acres covered with weeds, and with scarcely a head of cattle on them—why? Because the British landowner won't learn. He's purblind, eaten up with false pride. He keeps his political party together admirably by marking time and doing nothing; and he applies the same principle to his property rather than give in and own that there's anything still for him to learn. When he's obliged to own that other countries are doing better

in agriculture than he does, he puts it down to anything but his own ignorance and prejudice; and so he's left behind. Here is your father with a fine property that should be richly productive and a market at his door gaping for all it can get, and where is he?"

Godiva compressed her lips to keep the answer in.

"At any rate," she said, after a pause, "I intend to learn. There is nothing occult in a knowledge of agriculture, and I shall want it if I ever have property of my own to manage. I have seen enough of what comes of not minding your own business."

"Good," said Seraph, "and if I can teach you anything, Miss Pointz——"

"I should be satisfied if you would teach me all that you know," she rejoined. "A smattering is worse than useless."

From this time forward they worked together, and very soon all of Godiva's heart that was not in the land was Seraph's without the asking. She would not have looked at him had there been men of her own class to choose from; but when men are scarce, a man has a chance of being taken on his own merits as a man, apart from any other consideration. In this matter nature has as much of her own way with young women as with other females. Sex is a powerful leveller; bring the influence of sex to bear, and the most obstinate prejudice melts; only religious principle can withstand its insidious persuasion. Love does not overlook, it transforms. In the eyes of love a blemish becomes an attraction. Godiva saw in Seraph's uncouthness a sign of strength, a proof of manliness. Solecisms which continued to make her wince, she excused by finding others to blame for them. "*Press-ally*" jarred horribly at first, but she made Mrs. Pratt responsible for it; Mrs. Pratt would have corrected him if she had not been a stepmother, she knew enough; therefore Seraph was to be pitied at present for "*press-ally*," and taught better by and by. For Godiva flattered herself, as is customary in such cases, that anything which she acknowledged to be a defect she had it in her power to correct when she should be licensed by marriage to speak freely. Thus many a woman has flattered herself to her own eventual undoing and the destruction of all her comfort in life. Love itself cannot eradicate the

ineradicable. The grossness that is innate may be masked for a time, but sooner or later it will out; and base blood, though it may be latent a lifetime, is apt to betray itself unexpectedly by a base act. But Godiva had no reason to suspect Seraph of an inheritance of baseness. She had looked down on her own mother at one time as of inferior birth, but after she became intimate with Seraph her views on the subject underwent a radical change. Character, she assured herself, was more important than lineage; and with regard to character where was there a record better than the Pratts? She knew that Seraph's mother was a milliner, but there are plenty of most estimable milliners; and all her life, by high and low, she had never heard his father mentioned except with respect. There was no satisfaction in being Miss Pointz of Pointz which she could compare to the pleasure of Seraph's clasp on her hand; and, now that she knew of a better, she no longer valued her position. The first position in the world to secure was the position of being loved by a lover; the only one worth having.

In one short year the changes for the better at Pointz became the marvel of the neighbourhood, but the improvements on the property were less remarkable than the improvement in Godiva. Nothing embellishes like love and hope, with plenty of congenial work that is worth the doing, done in close companionship with the one and only. Godiva's blotched complexion cleared, her lustreless hair shone, her figure filled out; there was nothing of the old Godiva left in appearance that was not enhanced in beauty. She was like a spirited resemblance of her former unattractive self.

First aid in the matter of the money difficulty had come from the sale of the Goya, for which that foreign collector of whom the squire had heard had made a munificent offer immediately after Mickleham discovered the picture at Pointz. The property not being entailed, Algernon had no say in the matter, but in any case he would not have troubled himself. He had no regard for family heirlooms, except for the money they might realise. Time for him was the present moment; he snatched at any means to add to his immediate pleasures or to relieve his immediate cares; to any far-off consequence that might follow he was indifferent when he was not blind. Fore-

sight is the reward of self-restraint, and Algernon Pointz had neither. There was nothing he would not have approved of his father selling so long as he gave him a share of the proceeds. His affairs were desperately embarrassed. His one hope of escape from financial ruin was in a rich marriage, and Lady Ann Brabant was the object of his pursuit; but the matter had been delayed by an embarrassment more serious even than the money difficulty, which was pressing upon him with a threat of social destruction. He had made his regiment, a swagger cavalry corps, too hot to hold him by a little indiscretion at cards. His colonel, who happened to be a gentleman, had always thought him a bounder, and was glad of an excuse to get rid of him; but this particular excuse, if it were made public, would redound to the discredit of the regiment. When the matter was reported to him he expressed a wish to avoid scandal. His officers took the hint.

And immediately afterwards it was known that Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz had applied for an exchange. He got one into a regiment then serving in India, and was ordered to the Depôt at Closeminster. He gave as a reason for exchanging his desire to cut down expenses. His mother embraced and blessed him for this noble self-sacrifice; his father, who knew more about service matters than about agriculture, grimly asked him point blank why he had been rushed. Naturally he stuck to his story. And no sooner was he settled at the Depôt than he came to Pointz on leave for the purpose of pursuing Lady Ann.

With this object in view he set off to walk to the Castle one afternoon, but happening to overtake Beryl Blatchford on the way, whom he very much preferred to the insipid little Lady Ann, he was diverted from his intention, and turned up at the Rectory instead. There he found Lena Kedlock, Mrs. Blatchford, and Vincent, the young naval officer, who had come home on leave for a week to say good-bye to his family, his ship being under orders for the China station. During the week his family had seen very little of Vincent, for, there being no other victim available upon whom Lena could practise her arts, she had managed day after day to lure him away. But Mrs. Blatchford resigned herself for his sake. She saw all young people from the point of view of matrimony, and

this young lady, a connection of the Brabants, would be an excellent match. Nothing but interest gets a man on in the navy, and with such interest as Lena's family could command, Vincent would be an admiral in no time. Mrs. Blatchford herself "couldn't do with the minx at all," but what did that matter if Vincent could? Besides, Lena might improve. Indeed, as she appeared that day, one would have said that she had improved, remarkably. There was such a far-away look in her eyes, as if her thoughts were soaring upwards; and she was so gentle, so subdued, Mrs. Blatchford for the first time allowed that there really was something attractive about her apart from her family connexions.

Lena had arrived with a basket of fruit and flowers which she presented with a kind message from the duchess. When she wanted an excuse to pay a visit, she always took something with a message from the duchess, and was sure of a welcome. She had made the mean drawing-room at the Rectory a bower of beauty with the flowers, and Mrs. Blatchford, soothed by the sense of it, sat at the tea-table and smiled, forgetful for a blissful interval of all her sordid cares.

"I must write and thank the dear duchess," she said, looking round her complacently.

"Do, if you wish to annoy her," Lena answered absently.

"My dear!" Mrs. Blatchford exclaimed.

Lena roused herself. "The duchess hates formal thanks," she said. "I'll just tell her you were pleased——"

"Pleased is hardly the word," Mrs. Blatchford interrupted her fervently.

"Delighted, then, if you like," Lena amended. "But she doesn't like gushing messages. Duchesses don't as a rule."

"Naturally not," said Mrs. Blatchford, distracted from the point by this interesting piece of information, but at the same time careful not to let Lena suppose her ill-acquainted with duchesses by showing that it was news to her. "Her grace was looking her best, I thought, in church on Sunday."

"Was she?" said Lena, indifferently. Then seeing that Mrs. Blatchford expected more of a response, she made an effort to be conversational, but without clearing her mind of its pre-occupation, the result being an abstract proposition suggested by that allusion to the duchess's looks, which astonished Mrs.

Blatchford. "What's the use of being a duchess if you don't look like one?" Lena asked absently. "I suppose, though, it is better to be a duchess and not look like one, than to look like one and not be a duchess. Being a duchess has its compensations, but only to look like one must be aggravating."

Mrs. Blatchford signed to Vincent to offer Lena a cup of tea, and watched him take it to her as anxiously as if it had been a question of feeding a dangerous animal which was more likely to repay the attempt with a snarl and a bite than to show any proper appreciation of it as a kind attention. Lena had been thinking of Ella Banks, a puzzling subject; for Ella had left the neighbourhood without a word of explanation or farewell.

From where Lena sat she could see the approach to the house, and her next remark restored Mrs. Blatchford to her right mind and happiest mood—the mind and mood for match-making.

"Here comes Beryl the Beautiful, accompanied by Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz," Lena announced, and added absently, "the Blond Beast."

But Mrs. Blatchford missed the addendum. "Vincent!" she cried excitedly, "ring! No, go yourself. It'll be quicker. Two more cups and some fresh tea. Here—come back—stupid! Take the tea-pot."

Vincent, fiery red with shame, took the tea-pot from her hand, and, coming into collision with Beryl as the door opened, upset the contents all over her.

Beryl behaved nobly. She neither showed ill-feeling nor affected to laugh, but just smiled naturally, and shook the tea leaves from the front of her dress. "All right, Vincent," she said. "I can change in a moment. Lena—! How are you?"

Lena sauntered forward and allowed herself to be kissed. "How are you?" she said. "And good-bye. I'm just going."

Mrs. Blatchford, occupied with Captain Algernon outwardly, and inwardly with a vision of her daughter, the reigning queen at Pointz, was oblivious of this abrupt departure, and Lena and Vincent were well on the way together to Her Repose before she thought of either of them again.

Her Repose was well established as a hospital by now. It had been opened just in time to deal with an outbreak of diph-

theria among the children at Pointz, and sundry cases of typhoid from the farms about, where the fever was sporadic. Fusty Ginger had also been taken in by special favour, an incurable case. The doctor had objected that there was nothing to be done for him but smooth the rest of the way; to which Lena had indignantly retorted: "And do you call that nothing?"

The hospital had been an absorbing interest to her from the moment the duke had consented to let her have the house for the purpose. She had superintended the structural alterations, ordered the fittings under the local doctor's guidance, chosen decorations and furniture, and engaged the nurses; and when finally the beds began to fill, it might have been supposed that it gave her pleasure to see people suffer, so apparent was her content. She had been indefatigable in her attentions to all the patients, but more especially to Fusty Ginger. He was not merely a "case." He was the object of her life for the time being. How best to smooth the rest of the way for him? Day and night she asked herself the question; and day and night she was with him, doing her best, whenever there was anything to be done.

She was going to him now, with Vincent in attendance. No one can say that Lena did not make the most of her time. Fusty and Vincent were going their several ways, and she meant to see the last of them both, and give to each a suitable send-off.

Her Repose was visible from the Castle, nestling close to the towering headland of the Coastguard's Death, on the farther side of which it lay to the west. The house stood up high on a rock promontory, which was almost surrounded by water when the tide was in; a lovely position in storm or calm, but according to taste. Those who think that "There is no joy but calm," delighted to be there when the sea was singing a lullaby to the hushed land; but the ruder spirits expanded best when the wild winds were racketing with the wild waves on the rocks below.

The way to Her Repose skirted the Castle hill on the level. It ran between hawthorn hedges that looked like works of art, so thick and trim were they, so rounded atop, so free from intrusive strangers such as bramble, wild rose, and scrambling briony; a united family of hedges, they were admirable for

their orderliness, but with no beauty to charm in the dull monotony of their aristocratic exclusiveness. The footpath, with its close-clipped grass border, was like a garden walk; and the road itself looked as if it had been rolled smooth every day. Any one would have known that he was on the duke's estate. Everything there bespoke wealth well spent, and if the money did come from the slums, like manure which deserves to be called dirty, it became transformed in the application also like manure, and lost its bad character when it was considered as the source of so much deservedly admired fertility.

It was sultry weather, dull, dark, and oppressive. The unbroken monotonous grey of the cloudless sky was mirrored in the unbroken monotonous grey of the waveless sea. There was no air. Nature seemed to be holding her breath and listening. A little bird which had set up a shrill pipe was suddenly hushed as if it had been told to keep still. Walking was an effort, but Lena hurried on regardless of the heat.

"Why 'Her Repose'?" Vincent asked at last, breaking a long silence.

"Why not?" Lena snapped.

Vincent drew himself up, displeased. He did not understand that a woman's irritation goes out in these little ebullitions and makes way for a better mood, although he had experienced the relief of swear-words, their equivalent, himself.

Lena knew in a moment when the line by which she had him in tow became dangerously taut, and she paid out a little more to relieve the strain. "Do you believe in ghosts?" she said, looking as if she were suffering from them. "Have you ever felt things about? I have a room at Her Repose. I sleep there oftener now than at the Castle. Sleep is a figure of speech, though, for I am generally about all night."

Vincent nodded by way of making a non-committal but at the same time comprehensive, sort of response. "A houseful of sick people at night is enough to make anybody nervous and fanciful," he said, and killed the confidence that was coming.

Her Repose, which had been mainly used as a retreat for unmarried ladies and widows of the Brabant family, was said to have been built for a more sinister purpose. There was a legend of a recalcitrant duchess who had been carried there

for the good of her health—"she being sore sicke," it was carefully explained—but had never returned or been decently buried, so far as was known. The high wall, which crossed the promontory from cliff to cliff, cutting it off from the mainland, the heavy gates, strongly barred, and narrow postern,—favoured such legends; but once within the gates there was nothing to suggest either fortress or prison. It was a secluded spot, but it was a luxurious seclusion, the seclusion of the sybarite. Trees and flowers and flowering shrubs flourish close to the water in that soft climate, and the approach to the house was through gardens which were a mass of trees and flowering shrubs. Outwardly, against the greenery, the warm grey stone of the building suggested nothing more sombre than solidity; within, all was spacious and airy and bright. It was an ideal spot for lovers, and not the less ideal for the sick and sorry, for whom space and air and brightness are even more important.

Lena entered as one with the right of possession. Salutations of respect greeted her from every one, and, more gratifying still, smiles of affection. There were convalescents about, two men, a woman, and some children, for each of whom she had a word which, to judge by their faces, was clearly the right word. From the moment she crossed the portal Lena was a different person, an older, more serious person, and one upon whom responsibility sat easily. Vincent, following her watchfully, found himself readjusting his whole conception of her character. The puzzle that she had been to him ceased: "This is Lena herself at last," he concluded. They met the doctor coming away from the house.

"How is he?" she asked without other salutation.

"Bad," was the reply, "and asking for you." Lena nodded and went in.

"I wonder—" she began as they crossed the hall.

"Wonder what?"

"I wonder when it is best to go—when the sun is out, or in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night."

"When the sun's out, I should think, though some people like to travel at night," he answered dryly. Such silly, fanciful language seemed to his simplicity unworthy of the Lena newly revealed to him. He knew his Bible, too, and was mis-

erably uncertain as to whom she might be classing with the reprehensible young man under discussion in that passage. He had discovered by this time that her apparently irrelevant remarks were usually the logical outcome of a connected train of thought.

"Is there night on the other side, I wonder," she pursued.

"Do you mean at the antipodes?" he asked. She shrugged her shoulders. "The Americans talk of England as the other side," he added, anxious to please her, and seeing that something was wrong with his first venture.

But she gave it up, such literalness being apparently beyond enlightenment, and changed the subject.

"I must leave you a minute," she said. "I have to take off my hat and make myself look at home. Fusty never feels safe if I'm not on the premises, so we let him suppose that I live here. If he thinks I'm busy or in bed asleep, he's very considerate; but if he suspected that I was not somewhere about, it would upset him dangerously. He is afraid of going when I'm not here."

"Going where?"

"Into the Land of the Great Hereafter," she answered, wondering at his density.

"But how can you help him——"

"To get there? I am to hold his hand. I promised."

She left him looking down into the hall from the gallery which ran round three sides of it. Here everything was pretty much as the Ladies Brabant had left it. There were paintings on the walls, and Persian rugs on the slippery marble floor; carved cabinets and easy-chairs; silk hangings; and a heterogeneous assortment of curios, collected at odd times here, there and everywhere, without design, and left lying about, as often happens in old houses, waiting for the convenient season and the somebody who never comes, to put them away. The hospital fitters would have had the hall cleared and the walls made antiseptic, but Lena objected: "I won't have the entrance look like 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here,'" she protested. "It will be bad enough in the wards"—by which she meant bare enough. But when she knew enough to see safety and health in the bareness, she lost all sense of discomfort, and only about the hall and Fusty's room was she obstinate. The sick

should have an exhilarating welcome, she maintained, and those for whom there was no hope on earth, should be made joyful in the hope of heaven. "The Little Pilgrim goes up Higher," a parting guest, who must be honoured to the last.

Therefore she put Fusty Ginger in a beautiful room with one window through which he could look south over the wide waters, where ships of every burden and of all nations passed at times backwards and forwards; and could also see the tide rise till it covered the rocks below, and then recede till the long strip of sand farther out appeared, a golden causeway, inviting to the eye, and with a call to come in its untrodden smoothness. The other window looked out along the coast into the west, where the soul might see, in the sunset, the power and the glory which beckon it away, and the promise of rest and peace for which it yearned. From the angle at which Fusty's bed had been placed, he could enjoy the view in every direction, and also see all over his room, by merely turning his head.

His anxious eyes were fixed on the door when Lena opened it, but his whole expression passed into placid content when he saw who it was. He shut his eyes when he had made sure of her, apparently without noticing Vincent. Lena motioned Vincent to a chair, and, taking up a piece of embroidery which she kept in the room, sat down beside the bed, in full view of Fusty when he should open his eyes, and began to work. The nurse who had been in charge, quietly slipped away.

The sick man was propped up high in bed. He lay with his head thrown back on the broad white pillow, breathing heavily. Lena glanced at him from time to time, Vincent sat watching them both. The heavy breathing, the sound of the sea swishing on the rocks below, and the ticking of the clock on the marble mantelpiece, alone broke the silence. The day was waning. Low down in the west the level grey of the sky was broken by bars of crimson. Time seemed to stand still, yet Vincent felt as if hours had passed since he entered the room. When they escaped from the Rectory Lena had said, "Come and sit with Fusty," and he had tacitly agreed to all that might be implied in the invitation by coming; but what might be implied beyond sitting with Fusty he had not asked Lena, nor had she explained. She wanted his company, and

he was only too glad to be wanted. So, like an automaton, he sat in the comfortable chair she had motioned him to take, passively waiting and content to wait passively, hypnotised by the sense of what was expected of him.

The tide was rising. The waves, as if they were making a final effort in impatience to be done with their task, broke with a crash, and beat upon the rocks below in quick succession. The crash of each wave as it broke was separate and distinct, but under it and over it, rose the sound of the wind and the sea, an everlasting, all-pervading, monotonous, vague accompaniment. It filled the room; it filled the universe; there was no interval of space or thought it did not fill. And yet it was a minor matter, this mighty sound. The ticking of the marble clock on the mantelpiece, and the sick man's laboured breathing, being more obtrusive, claimed more attention, as all-important.

Fusty opened his eyes and looked at Lena, diligently working, and at the same time he played with the bright-coloured silks she had been careful to put within his reach; feeling them, as if their soft texture were grateful to his dry, emaciated fingers. She was working a wreath of flowers on a white silk ground for a screen, and presently she held it up for him to look at.

"Fur-git-me-not," he said, as if the words were written on the silk, and he was reading them with difficulty. "Wild rose, and primrose, and green fern, an' now fur-git-me-not," he further deciphered.

It had amused him for many days to watch her at work. It was a never-failing source of wonder and interest to him to recognise the flowers her busy fingers produced so deftly on the smooth white surface of the silk, and to hear about the nuns who taught her, and about the convent in which they lived and died so strangely, as it seemed to him.

His mind wandered to the nuns now. "And they don't never marry, none of them," he said, apparently alluding to the flowers, but Lena understood him.

"None of them," she said.

"Would they be willing fur you to marry, miss?" he asked anxiously.

"Quite," she said.

"Then you'll be gettin' married, I expect?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, as if the thing were too certain and ordinary to be worth mentioning.

Fusty seemed to become aware of Vincent's presence for the first time. He inspected him with a shrewd glance, then looked at Lena and raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

She shook her head.

"I thought not," Fusty said. "Some'ow I seemed to see." He looked again at the young naval officer, and approved of his handsome, clean-shaved face. He thought it a pity she wouldn't have him, and was going to say so, but Lena drew off his attention and prevented the indiscretion.

"I forgot," she said. "This is the sailor-man I promised to bring."

"Him as has seen the Southern Cross?" Fusty asked, with more animation than he had yet shown. "Sailor orf'cer, I should say—ain't you, sir?"

"Yes," Vincent answered. "Royal Navy."

"It's easy to see that you're no sailor-man," Fusty observed; "but my young lady must 'ave 'er joke. And you've seen the Southern Cross!" His voice dropped on the words; there was awe and expectation in his face.

"Yes," said Vincent, briefly—because he imagined that poor Fusty's vision of the cross must make anything he could say on the subject seem miserably inadequate—"down there." He pointed south.

During the long pause that followed, Vincent felt ashamed of the Southern Cross and determined to say no more about it if he were not obliged to, lest he should expose it for the fraud it was.

Up and up the weary waves were climbing over the rocks, on and on the clock ticked, and Lena sewed, and nothing happened. Time seemed to be standing still because of the fearful rate at which it was passing. Fusty had lost all consciousness of its flight. When he answered Vincent an hour later, he was under the impression that Vincent had but just spoken.

"There's another gen'elman I know 'as seen the Southern Cross," Fusty began. He had been freshened by the interval of repose, his voice was stronger, his breathing less difficult.

Lena interrupted with rum and milk, his favourite restorative, then re-arranged his pillows, bathed his hands and face with perfumed water, and brushed his tawny hair. Refreshed and gratified by these attentions, he worked himself up higher on his pillows and winked at Vincent with great expression. "That's my young lady," he remarked in parenthesis, confidentially, and then resumed: "There's another gen'elman I know as has seen the Southern Cross. From wot 'e said, I guess it makes nothin' of a show, but that was jest 'is pint. It's not wot you see of a thing, but wot it stands fur does the trick, if you know wot it stands fur. There's the Victoria Cross now—nothin' to look at, but w'y do you clap the chap on the back as wears it, and give 'im drinks till 'e drops? 'Cos you'd bust if you bottled up what you felt and did nothin'. I was once throwed out of a public, and took up by the police, and fined ten shillings by the beak, and costs five pounds or a month, and all fur wot? Fur enthusiasm! A cock-eyed man wi' a wooden leg 'ad come in and I seed 'e was wearin' the Victoria Cross. Some things did get broke and a crowd that collected was unrooly. Still, enthusiasm isn't drunk and disorderly; there's a difference; and I ses so at the time." He gazed out over the wide waste of waters dreamily for a little. "I was tellin' that yarn one night in camp, an' that's 'ow we got to the Southern Cross. He put it more beautiful, but it amounted to this: If the Victoria Cross, wot stands fur the best a man can do fur a man, makes you so joyful w'en you see it that you've got to smash round becos you can't contain yourself, wot must yer feel in front of that there Southern Cross if you know what it stands fur? He never ses very much, but, my! w'en 'e talks of The Power and The Glory, then you know!" He looked at Vincent: "W'en my young lady told me she knowed a sailor-man wot 'ad seen the Cross, I wanted to see 'im. I wanted to see wot it 'ad done fur 'im."

"What had it done for your gentleman, Fusty?" Lena asked. They had all to call him Fusty. He insisted on it because he could not remember the name he had adopted on the spur of the moment when Adnam engaged him, and he was afraid of raising any sort of suspicion against himself that might lead to inquiries being made, and the discovery of his

record, which was speckled with misdemeanours. He was having his first taste of respectable life in camp, and his appreciation of the flavour marked him for one of the many against whom society, like the hardened criminal it is, sins doubly: in the first instance, by giving them no chance, and secondly, by punishing them for the consequences and ruling them unfit to associate with its well-protected pets.

"Wot 'ad it done fur 'im?" Fusty replied. "I don't know rightly if it done it, but I thought it might 'ave made 'im wot 'e is—or helped. If so"—he looked at Vincent shrewdly—"it doesn't always act."

"It may next time, now I know what to think of it," Vincent said soberly.

"You don't know though, yet," Fusty assured him. "I can't tell you. Get 'im. W'y, 'e knows! The doctor 'e said to me, 'Fusty,' 'e ses, as solemn as you please, 'you're in a bad way. I'd advise you to settle yer affairs. A man dies no sooner fur makin' of 'is will. An' the parson 'e ses in 'is sermon, lookin' straight at me: 'Be'old the app'inted time. Repent while it is called to-day. Rend yer 'earts and not yer garments.' And they sort o' got my back up, both on 'em. But one night I 'ad a bad turn—sheer funk. I was all of a sweat, 'an' I ses: 'Wot's to become of us? Tell us, man o' mystery. You know.' An' 'e jest looked at me an' ses: 'There's a greater mystery than me in front of you—close in front. I advise you to prepare yerself fur that.' But it wasn't the words as did it. There was more to it than words. The doctor 'ad spoke, an' the parson 'ad spoke, and only riled me—" Fusty's lean face grew radiant. "I've bin 'appy ever since," he said. "It's bin the time of me life."

"Who is this gentleman?" Vincent asked.

"Mickleham, one of Adnam's men," Lena answered.

"No, Miss Lena," Fusty answered positively; "not one of us. The men, without knowing, would 'ave said 'sir' to 'im, and called 'im 'mister' every time if they 'adn't stopped to think. I knew, 'cos I'd bin a waiter in London off and on—" He checked himself, and refused to explain.

Mickleham had visited Fusty regularly in hospital, and Lena knew him well.

"Tell me who he is, Fusty?" she coaxed. "Now that he's

gone away, what can it matter? Was he a prince in disguise or disgrace or something?"

Fusty looked at Vincent with a humorous twinkle. "I bin afraid my young lady was all aingel," he said—"too good to live. I'm 'appy she asked that question. Aingels is 'aving too good an eternal time to be curious; they ask no questions fur fear of hearing something onpleasant as will disturb their minds. But a good woman wants to know, and asks. Curiosity? Not much! Thought and care. She's caring all the time. That's 'ow it is she's on the spot always with a 'elping 'and, no matter for who, nor what you've done. It's the mother in 'em. Charity in the pictures is a mother—Bless her!"

He flung out his lean dry hand, palm upwards, on the coverlet, towards Lena as she spoke. She clasped it tight and held it. Her eyes were bright with tears. Fusty's face, which had been drawn and haggard with suffering, was changing. The strained expression passed and was succeeded by a smile of content. He lay looking at Lena, and once or twice his grasp on her hand tightened, as if he were clinging to it. He had sunk down lower in the bed.

"You've tired yourself, Fusty," she said. "Have a sleep now. I'll sit here and hold your hand as long as you like."

"Ay, if it don't tire you," he muttered. "Hold my 'and awhile, it's a help." He raised her hand with momentary energy, and looked at it. "A lady's little 'and," he said. "The first I ever touched. Lord, the power of a little 'and like that for good—for good!"

"You're talking too much," said Lena. "Sleep now."

She gave his hand a gentle shake by way of good-night. He shut his eyes and soon was breathing heavily but regularly, as if asleep. Presently he began to mutter; then there came the words, queerly uttered but distinct:

*"There was a little Japanese
So very apt at catching fleas——"*

The rest trailed off inaudibly.

"He thinks he's singing," Lena whispered. "He used to at night, often," she laughed silently at the recollection, "when he was wandering. And some of his songs! Funny, yes,

but—! And there was no stopping him. He said he had to practise them for Mrs. Pratt, she's so particular—Mrs. Pratt! Oh, Vincent, hold my hand!”

The adjuration to hold her hand was a mere expletive, her one disengaged hand being at the moment on active service, helping her to suppress an ecstasy of mirth.

Her levity under the circumstances was a shock to Vincent. He stared at her in amazement. Then suddenly it occurred to him that she was overwrought. “Hadn't you better go and rest,” he said considerately. “I'll stay with him.”

“I am not going to rest to-night,” she replied, recovering herself as easily as she had let herself go. “We are short-handed, and I must sit up. But I should be glad if you would stay and help me. The doctor will pay his evening visit presently, and then we shall be relieved by a nurse for an hour, and we can go and dine.”

“But after dinner I wish you would leave him to me, and go to bed.”

“Oh, no, no! I might miss—” She pulled herself up, and concluded decidedly: “I must be here.”

The sultry day was closing in rapidly; already it was dusk in the room. The waves heaved to their limit with a sob, and receded sighing. The tide had turned.

Fusty's rest was broken. He muttered and moaned. Once only he spoke clearly: “There's a deal of traffic in the street,” he said. Then his breathing became very difficult. For a little he fought for air. But he never let go her hand, never lost consciousness of her touch; and Lena, though shaken and revolted by the struggle for breath, held on bravely, and whispered a word of encouragement now and then.

Gradually the paroxysm passed. For a little while he continued to gasp at intervals—at wider intervals, until at last he seemed at ease. The tension released, the watchers sat in silence in the gathering darkness; not thinking; not even consciously attentive, yet keenly alive to the sense of each other's presence, to the ticking of the clock, to the incessant sound of the sea, to its sobbing and sighing as it receded from the rocks, to the mournful murmur it became, gradually, farther and farther away. Heaving water, cloudless sky, gathering darkness—then, low down in the west, one big, bright star.

Vincent and Lena started. Had they both been asleep? From what immeasurable distance were they abruptly brought back? from out of what land of faery into this workaday world by workaday footsteps and workaday words? The door opened, letting the lamplight in from the corridor. The doctor and a nurse were in the room.

"What!" the doctor exclaimed in a cheery, confident tone, "what, darkness!"

"Hush!" Lena warned him. "He's asleep. He's had some difficulty of breathing—a bad bout. But he's quite easy now."

Doctor and nurse stood still a moment, listening intently—listening long enough to mark the silence. "Light the lamp, nurse," the doctor said, in an altered voice.

The lamplight fell on the bed, on Fusty Ginger, on Lena faithfully holding his hand; a garish illumination unsparing of gruesome details—staring eyes, dropped jaw, touzled tawny head hanging to one side—"Drop that shade!" the doctor exclaimed.

The gruesome details were softened, but they did not disappear. Lena had sickened at the sight. She dropped the limp hand and would have thrown her own hand away, if she could, in disgust of the thing she had touched. Yet the thing fascinated her. She stepped backwards from the bed with her eyes on it.

"He's not—*dead*?" she exclaimed under her breath.

"Yes, poor chap," the doctor said, in the kind tone that lets in common sense to re-adjust the mental balance. "He's won through—easily, too. A happy death."

The nurse was covering up the figure on the bed. The screen he had watched Lena at work upon with such interest so short a time ago, the bright-coloured silks he had toyed with, fell off the coverlet and were scattered on the floor.

"But people don't die like that!" Lena remonstrated.

"How do they die then?" the doctor asked patiently.

"Don't they say things? Don't they see things and tell you? Don't they bid eternal farewells, and make you feel—?" She pointed to the bed. "That is not dying like a man," she said; "it's going out like a candle."

The doctor slightly shrugged his shoulders. "Come," he

said, drawing her hand through his arm, and leading her from the room.

She was wild to wash her hands, to have them purified; the doctor must give her something— The doctor understood her disgust, and saw to the cleansing himself; discoursing the while to distract her on the qualities of antiseptics and perfumes, and their effects, physical and mental, which he held to be relative. "With this," he said, pouring something from a bottle into a basin of water, "I make your hands immaculate; and with this"—he added a delicious perfume to the mixture—"I make you feel that they are so. Their being so is not enough. The sense that they are so is necessary to set your mind at rest. There are microbes of the mind as well as of the body, and they are transferable from the one to the other, and must be exterminated from both. Disease can be bred in the body by the action of the mind, and by the action of the mind it can also be cured. The recognition of this fact is the beginning of wisdom in medical practice. The physician who is not a master of mental therapeutics and the art of suggestion is a journeyman working without his best tool."

By the time Lena had mastered the meaning of "therapeutics" she was amenable to the suggestion that she would sleep best at the Castle that night. Acting with her usual precipitancy, she insisted on hurrying away at once on foot, and Vincent, dinnerless but not hungry, was ready enough to escort her.

Out in the dusk, with the formal hedges on either hand, and the sea a mere sound in the distance, the sweet air and the stillness wrought on her racked nerves beneficently. Seen in prospective, the ugly details of her late experience were merged in the whole effect picturesquely, and her mood softened. The horrible corpse, resuming the familiar outward semblance of the suffering soul which was Fusty, became an object of pity and interest, a centre whence thought flew off at a tangent from time to eternity.

"I suppose they have laid him out," was the first remark she made after leaving Her Repose. "I wish I hadn't hurried away. I love to pay my respects to the dead. All is so beautiful about them, so still, so placid; this—" she indicated the round world and they that dwell therein—"all over and done

with. And so small! You feel life so small in the presence of death. Here there is such a little crowded space, we can never move as we would; we are jostled and hustled and driven, Free agents! How can we be free agents when our every move is determined by the impact of others in the crowd? Beyond all this turmoil there is immensity, there is room to move, we know that; but what else is there? Afterwards? I am racked by the desire to know. I cannot imagine anything beyond but emptiness and solitude."

"You are great at feeling and knowing," he remarked, frowning in discomfort. All this was too unusual to please him; too eccentric for his comprehension. It was not the way a naval man expected young girls to talk.

"It is awful, isn't it, not to know where that poor soul is now!"

"He is happy now," Vincent earnestly assured her, falling back on the restful conventional platitudes of his religion with the accustomed sense of relief. "And he was happy till the last moment. Didn't he say he'd had the time of his life of late? And didn't the doctor call it a happy death? He should know."

"But to come to an end," Lena said, shuddering; "to talk and laugh and feel and care, as he did, one moment, and the next to be nothing! And without preparation, too! The Roman Catholics die better. They have great comfort in their religion to the very last. I wish there had been an altar with lights and the Blessed Sacrament exposed; and a priest to shrive him and administer Extreme Unction, and recite the Prayers for the Dying; and music, for a foretaste of heaven. Then he would have gone on his way rejoicing; happy in his last glimpse of earth, hopeful of his first glimpse of heaven. Protestants die like dogs."

"But you are not a Roman Catholic," he remonstrated.

"I shall not live a Catholic," she answered, "but I should like to die like one. There is great joy in a solemn occasion; and dignity—something uplifting—in such a death. Look at the triviality of poor Fusty's last moments! Think of the meaning of his last words! 'There's a deal of traffic in the street,' he said."

They turned off from the high road here, on to a narrow

winding sheep track that led up to the Castle. Neither spoke for some time, and in the interval she was seized upon by a terrible sense of desolation.

"Oh, for some comfort!" she exclaimed at last, wringing her hands. "My heart is bursting for a word of comfort! Something to relieve the ache of this awful loneliness!"

"Lena, dear, let me comfort you," he exclaimed, very earnestly. "I'm not much of a chap, but I love you. You know that I love you. I want to make you happy. I want nothing else in the world so much."

She was not reminded of her own words to Ella Banks: "When a man begs you on his knees to make him happy, fight shy of him; but if he says, 'Let me make you happy,' treat him with respect." What she thought of now was the interesting fact that Vincent was the first man to tell her he loved her. She foresaw endless repetitions of the pleasant experience, but she realized also that the full charm of this first occasion could never recur, and she set herself to make the most of it while it lasted.

He had stretched out his arm tentatively as he spoke, with the evident intention of putting it round her with her permission. For the lad was delicate and sincere. His one wish was to make her happy in her own way. Perceiving a tacit consent in the smile she gave him, he drew her to him, and imprinted a butterfly kiss on her lips.

The sheep track they were on was crossed at this point by a made path which led to a stone seat, placed there for the sake of the view. "Let us sit awhile," she said, turning off on to the path. "I'm weary."

When she was seated, with his arm round her and her head resting on his shoulder, she sighed contentedly: "This is comfort," she said; "the only real comfort there is in the whole universe."

The radiant dark of the night sky was sprinkled with some few stars. The waning moon, a bright white crescent, hung low over the waters of the bay on their left, and all the level land encircling the water on that side was a veiled mystery of substance and shadow. From the low shore the ground swept up boldly to the Coastguard's Death, the highest point of which, a dark towering crag, blotted out the sea immediately in front

of them, and there stopped short abruptly, with a drop of hundreds of feet sheer down to the beach below. Insignificant in contrast to the precipitous cliff that sheltered it, and from which it was separated by an inlet of the sea, nestled the green promontory on which stood Her Repose.

Lena, high perched on the steep hillside, looked down at the lighted windows now with indifference. Very far away were the twinkling yellow lights, though not so far as her thoughts at the moment from all that they stood for. Vincent held her close, and there was such soothing, such satisfaction in the clasp of his strong arm, that she would if she could have sat so all night, unconscious of everything but the peace that possessed her. Unfortunately, her tormented mind gave her no time to feel; she had to think; and, in her case, thought found immediate utterance, and the charm was broken.

"I always said I never would kiss a man who hadn't a moustache," she remarked. "I thought it would be insipid, like kissing a woman."

"And it isn't?" he said, kissing her again that she might make sure.

"Not in the least," she answered him, and paused.

Vincent laughed silently. Unutterably happy himself, he mistook her flippancy for a sign that she was happy too. His outlook upon life was of the simplest, the most direct. His earnest endeavour so far had been to do his duty honourably in every relation of life; and his settled intention was to continue straight to the end. He was a good son, a good brother, a good officer; and he meant (and for this he lived cleanly) to be a good husband and father eventually. It was not in his nature to trifle with a woman, nor had he conceived it possible that a woman would trifle with him. He set down the men and women who do trifle with each other as "outsiders"; the kind of people one may have to meet and associate with in the business of life, but can never countenance as equals, much less receive as intimates, or allow to become friends. To him, therefore, Lena's tacit consent to his comforting caresses implied also her tacit acceptance of himself. He took it for granted that henceforth they were consecrated to each other; and this was the realisation of a hope he had scarcely dared to think himself worthy to entertain, but had entertained never-

theless, passionately, since the first moment of their meeting. These being his principles, it is easy to understand the first bewildering effect of the blow she presently dealt him.

"How delicious it is here!" she exclaimed. "With a cigarette, it would be perfect."

"I don't want to smoke," he answered.

"But I do," she said.

Not pleased, but still anxious to make her happy in her own way, he withdrew his arms to get out his case. She took advantage of the movement to widen the distance between them. By the light of the match he held to her cigarette, he caught the sapphire glint in her dark eyes, a cold glitter, pure in colour as the gem itself, but without depth. At her request, he lighted a cigarette too.

"Now we can talk," she said, settling herself comfortably, as if the proceedings so far had merely been preliminary to the thing for which she really cared. The effect upon Vincent was chilling. "It's not quite the same though," she went on, reverting to the point at which she had broken off to ask for a cigarette.

"What is not quite the same?" he asked, unsuspectingly.

"Without a moustache—kissing, you know."

There was an ominous silence. "May I ask," he said at last, with a catch in his voice, "if you are in the habit of kissing men with moustaches?"

"Occasionally," she said. "Just one here and there, with and without! Not the Blond Beast, of course. But Eustace and Adnam, and the old boys—the duke, you know, and Uncle Appleton, and old Emery. It does them good; flatters them and warms their old hearts. Eustace said I wasn't to kiss any one while he was away, but I didn't promise."

"You are joking," he said. "You don't kiss Eustace really; only as a brother."

"But I do kiss Eustace 'really,'" she insisted.

"Then you do not kiss me again," he said, throwing his cigarette down the hill by way of emphasis.

"Oh, Vincent!" she exclaimed, "how can you be so horrid?"

"How can you?" he said bitterly. "A decent girl only kisses the man she loves, and you can't love us both."

"But I do love you both," she declared.

"You're talking nonsense," he replied.

"I'm not," she contradicted. "I must marry Eustace, but I can love you both."

"I don't know whether you are bad or only silly," he was beginning. "Yes, I do, though," he corrected himself. "You are not silly."

"I am just a lone lorn lassie with a sore heart," she pleaded; "and all I asked of you was comfort. How can being comforted by you affect Eustace or alter my feeling for him? If he were here—he would comfort me; but he is not here, so naturally I turn to you."

"It is not the right thing to do," he said severely. "What would Eustace say if he knew?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "What difference can it make to Eustace if I am always the same to him?" she wanted to know. "Didn't somebody say that it isn't the things themselves but what we think of them that matters?"

"I thought you loved me," he said, disconsolately. "I hoped you would marry me. But now I don't know. I should despise a wife who would let another man comfort her with kisses when I was away. How would you like your husband to kiss another woman?"

"The question is not worth considering," she answered in her casual way. "Eustace never would."

"You are sublime!"

"I am several people," she rejoined; "and I don't believe I shall ever find all I want in one man. At present it takes three of you to complete my party: you, and Eustace, and Adnam—Adnam for fun." She paused to think of Adnam as he was now, haunted by her image, hanging about her reluctantly and in the distance, but captured all the same, though he would not own it, even to himself. "I want you for a good comrade, an outdoor chum, and Eustace for a housemate, for the domestic me. He has fine domestic qualities, and the domestic me is nice, so he is to be congratulated."

"May I ask," he began formally—"I think I have a right to ask, are you engaged?"

"To Eustace? Yes. I am, but he isn't. That will be arranged by and by."

"Nonsense, again," he exclaimed.

"Of a kind," she allowed. "But my nonsense is generally like the whipped white of egg on the top of a pudding; it is a decoration to the more solid, nourishing substance beneath."

"I don't know what to think of you," he said desperately. "Are you only trying to be witty? You're not always witty when you try."

"No," she owned, "sometimes I'm silly; but I'm always good-natured."

"You are," he groaned. "Oh, Lena, dearest"—he took her hand—"why don't you try to be good?"

"I often ask myself," she answered comically. "But why on earth do all the men I know want me to be good? If I am not good, it is because the Lord has not made me good. His will be done." There was nothing irreverent in the way she said this; she spoke sadly. Her voice, exquisitely mellow, had a ring in it at times, an occasional pathetic cadence that went to the heart.

Vincent was torn with pity, as for a doomed creature. All the chivalry in him was stirred to defend her, to rouse her to resistance: "You are posing," he said, "to tease me. Don't. It isn't worthy of you. And I believe that's the worst of you, that you do pose. If you were not really good you would not do the things you do—at that hospital day after day—the risks you run! Diphtheria, typhoid—and that poor fellow all these weeks! Consumption is infectious."

"It is," she answered lightly; "but everybody doesn't catch it, and I shan't. There's a lot of mischief still for me to do in the world."

"You could not find happiness in such pursuits if you were not good at heart," he persisted.

"Oh, I'm good enough at heart," she replied. "Any one will tell you that. But as to finding happiness! Even if I had all I want— But I could never have all I want with so much want always in sight. The little maid who does my room has wants that it makes my heart ache to hear of because I cannot relieve them. She wants her parents to have ease and comfort in their old age, and they have a ne'er-do-well son, and a mad daughter-in-law, and an invalid grandchild; and she wants to

be strong to work, and she's frail; and she wants to marry the man she loves, but he can get no permanent employment. It racks me all the time to think what these people suffer. I feel it a wrong to them to be comfortable myself. Happiness? Nobody's happy! Look at Good Gracious!"

"Why do you speak of her disparagingly?" he said, his taste offended. "She's been kind as a mother to you."

"She has," Lena acknowledged cordially; "and it is because I appreciate her kindness that I am not going to marry Melton."

"It rests with you then—" he ventured.

"As to whom I shall take or leave? What do you think yourself?"

He thought her irresistible, but he avoided the flattering word. "I'm afraid you're abnormal," he said instead.

"On the contrary," she assured him. "I am the perfectly normal product of my parents. You know something of heredity. The drunkard's child is defective——"

He knew something of Colonel Kedlock too, and his soul sickened. Like a flash he apprehended the possible defect in her.

"I may be full of faults," she went on, "but you make me out worse than I am. Badness is in the mind. My mind is not corrupt. Kissing means no more to my mind than eating and drinking. My body asks for the one as for the other, and sets up the appetite."

Defective in moral consciousness, that was what this confusion of mind portended. To one of his stern creed, there was no hope in such a case. The drunkard's daughter was doomed.

He stood up and had to steady himself. The solid earth was reeling, the moon was falling from the sky. A meteor shot across the horizon and sank into the sea. So love had enlightened his life for a brief instant and was quenched. The grip she still had on his senses only revolted him. His impulse was to fly.

"Let me take you home," he said.

"Don't trouble," she answered, rising. "Why should you?" She set off up the hill as she spoke, making a bee-line for the Castle, but her feet slipped on the short grass. Vincent made his hand a socket for her elbow, and held her up until they

reached the level; careful of her, true gentleman that he was, so long as she should be under his care.

"How are you going to get in?" he inquired.

"There's a night watchman always on duty in case of goodness knows what—fire or something," she replied; "he'll let me in. Good-night!" She held out her hand, but it seemed a very lame conclusion.

The duke was sitting up late that night, for no particular reason. On her way to her room, Lena looked in to report progress at the hospital, in which he was keenly interested.

"Fusty Ginger is dead," she announced.

"Poor fellow! Were you in at the dea—were you there?"

"I was."

"Poor fellow!"

They honoured the dead with a brief silence; then the duke asked: "And since?"

"Where have I been? Sitting out on the hillside with Vincent Blatchford."

The duke raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

"He had a notion, poor boy, that it would be happiness to have me for a wife."

The duke smiled.

"I've cured him of that."

"How?—if I may venture to ask."

"My Lord Byron said, 'The best of Prophets of the future is the Past,'" she answered. "I touched upon heredity."

The duke sighed. "I am afraid you are incorrigible," he said indulgently. He was sitting at his writing-table, on which lay a letter, conspicuously.

"Where would the world be without the incorrigible?" she answered lightly, with her eyes on the letter. "Holiness is very often a blind leading of the blind; when the devil comes in all eyes are opened. How is Ella Banks?"

The duke involuntarily put his hand over the letter—his impulse being to conceal it, a futile proceeding, as he instantly perceived, since obviously she must have seen it. Honesty was the best policy.

"Would you like to see what she says?" he asked, holding the letter out to her. "She is a good girl—very satisfactory."

"Another time, thank you," she replied. "I have no interest in Ella or in anything else just now. It has been an eventful day, and my stock of energy has run dry. Good-night!"

She kissed him affectionately, yawned, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Castle, which had been somnolent for two years, was wide awake again. Men-servants were on the alert, maids on the giggle. The duchess's "few friends" were less stodgy than usual. The duke seemed more like a man in his own house than a neglected guest obliged to mope apart because nobody noticed him; and the duchess was flapping her maternal wings, so to speak, and clucking like an exultant hen just out from the coop with her first brood about her. For the boys were both at home again. It was the autumn of the second year since their departure. Eustace had been backwards and forwards from his Regiment at intervals, but Eustace by himself hardly counted. Melton was required to complete him, as it were, and Melton had lingered abroad until now. The event would scarcely have ruffled the surface of a modern-minded family of their distinction, but the Brabants were of the Victorian period, when distant journeyings were taken seriously, and safe returns were celebrated.

The little duchess all a-flutter, hovered about Melton on his arrival, inspected him up and down through her lorgnette, found him much improved; was sure he had grown; also that he was just the same; not a bit changed; and they both were the dearest boys in the world!

This was the burden of her song when the duke paid her his accustomed devoir next day.

"Nice fellows," said the duke. "Good friends, too. I like that."

Melton was off on Platinum the moment he could make his escape alone. Two years drifting had not changed him. The heir to a dukedom, on his travels, has the world at his feet.

The bright side of everything is uppermost, and people are all at their best. Such an experience is too sweet to be wholesome for many young men, but Melton had not suffered in character; had suffered from nothing but the monotony. The object of the journey, as Eustace had planned it, was to cure him of a dangerous affection of the heart. He had submitted to the experiment passively; he was even willing to be cured; but the affection was chronic, and the remedy in action proved to be merely palliative at the best, and, as is the case with palliatives generally, reaction followed the effect, and the trouble became if anything more troublesome. Melton had taken an interest in all he saw, but it was the interest of the traveller who is anxious to get to the end of a long journey and beguiles the time as best he can; not the interest of the leisurely wanderer whose only purpose is to see. Many women in many places had smiled their sweetest upon him, and won his attention; but only to an extent that puzzled them all; for no one suspected that when he appeared to be admiring he was merely comparing. He had his own high standard by which he tried them, and found even the loveliest fall short of it. They had their good points, but not one of them fulfilled every requirement of his fastidious taste—as she did. He had searched the whole wide world and seen for himself that there was but one perfect woman in it—Ella! Ella at her window. Ella silent, Ella speaking, Ella moving, Ella still—Ella, always perfect, whatever she did! Get on, Platinum, you laggard! These last few minutes are longer than the whole two years!

Melton drew rein at the turn of the road whence her window came in sight. It was not shut surely? Yes, it was shut, and a creeper had grown across it. It must have been shut for months.

Adam Hurst took what he called his “Sigh Esther” ducally now every afternoon, undisturbed as a rule, but that day he was ruthlessly aroused by Pettiblock, who burst in upon him without ceremony: “Here’s the markis, askin’ fur you, gerrup!” he urged.

“My coat!” Hurst gasped, all the man-servant in him alert in a moment at the call. The wagglng tassel on his black velvet smoking-cap made eccentric excursions, this way and

that, about his head as he struggled into his coat with Pettiblock's help.

Melton shook hands with him. The Brabants were always gracious. "Well, Adam," he said pleasantly, "how are you?"

"How is your lordship after your travels?" Hurst wanted to know. "We did a bit, too, his grace and me, what was his lordship then, about the world; and travellin' was travellin' in those days."

"What is it now?" Melton asked smiling, but did not wait for an answer. "Everything looks pretty much the same here," he went on. "Any news in the neighbourhood?"

"Well, there has been changes, my lord," Adam answered. "Won't your lordship sit down and take something?"

"Tea-time, isn't it?" Melton said, choosing a chair.

"Tea, my lord? Yes, directly. Len, get his lordship some tea." Adam rubbed his hands in an ecstasy of gratification. "Yes, there's been changes, my lord," he began, pouring out gossip as part of the entertainment. "There's the 'orspital as his grace has established for Miss Lena to play at in his goodness, which is a boon and a blessin' to the whole countryside, as you may say, though why 'Her Repose' has never been revealed. But it's been a good time on the whole. No death but what was to be expected and natural. The latter end of him as they called 'Fusty Ginger' by request, though not his name, was all that could be desired. Her grace was known to have visited him, and we gave him a fine funeral, which was a great pleasure to Miss Lena. She put on black and attended it herself on Mr. Adnam Pratt's arm, who was there too, Fusty being one of his men. And they do say he's doing splendid with his new-fangled intensity culture of his up at Pratt's Place. The harvest was got in in August, the first time for a many year, with the help of the dry weather. Hay was only middlin', and roots was bad, but grains was heavy. Farmer Hallbin 'as done fine, followin' Mr. Emery Pratt, what's got the luck with him, as is well known, though luck don't last for ever, and may be expected to turn any day, what would be a regret to everybody hereabouts, great and small, through being so much respected——"

"What about Pointz?" Melton interrupted.

"Pointz, my lord? Yes." Adam pinched his chin. "Pointz

has been what you might call in the public eye more than a bit. That Clutterbuck got the sack, which was time, though w'y for an excuse opinions differ. It's been kept dark, but not so dark that none of us can't see daylight. Mr. Seraph Pratt's up to Pointz all the time now, a blessing to the squire, for, though not popular, much respected on the land and like to make a good thing of it."

Here Pettiblock interrupted with the tea, and at the same time Luke Banks, fresh from a walk, blundered in, and, with an awkward salutation, blundered out again, on a hint from Adam, who had the tea-pot in his hand and pointed it at the door significantly.

"I know that man's face," Melton said.

"Luke Banks, my lord," Adam answered. "I hope your lordship's tea's to your liking."

"Excellent," Melton answered absently. "He seems to have come in for a share of the general prosperity. I remember when I went away——"

"Yes, my lord. Your lordship's memory is obliging. He was out-at-elbys, as you might say, but I give 'im a chance. I took 'im in 'ere, and it's made a man of 'im."

"Good of you, Adam. Capital. And the rest of the family?" Melton became all attention to his tea here. He put in the milk and sugar as if extreme accuracy in the quantities were all important, stirred up the tea, played with the spoon, and then absently put in milk and sugar all over again.

Adam was an observant man, and his peasant blood counselled caution upon this. "All doing well, my lord," he answered generally.

"All at home?" Melton asked, with affected carelessness.

"All out in the world, my lord, except the young ones and Richard. He 'elps his father."

"Where are they?" Melton asked, after perceptible pause.

"Robert's at Pratt's Place, foreman to Mr. Adnam, and a good man," Hurst answered, and stopped short.

"And—er—the sister?" Melton forced the question out.

"Gone, my lord," Hurst said solemnly. Melton went white to the lips. "By the goodness of her grace," Hurst added promptly, alive to the signal of distress. "These young folks do go. It's all going, marrying and that. Emily Rycote, she give us a rare shake up. Body 'ad us all out and dragged the

ponds, but I always had my suspicions of her. She was a bit wild, and w'en a gel in her position takes to walking in the fields with a gentleman, and you hear she's in a shop in London doing well with a fine figure, you'd like to believe it, but you don't say what you think if you've been about as I was, waitin' on high society, and knowing their ways. But, however, Miss Ella Banks was different, though for looks I never saw a female not of the 'ighest rank could compare, still, her grace be praised, we've got 'er settled."

Melton had risen. "Good day, Adam," he said, "and thank you. Excellent tea. Lovely weather! My horse there? No place like home, is there? Good day, and thank you."

Adam watched him out of sight, and stood on the doorstep, thoughtfully pinching his chin, after he had disappeared. "Here's a pretty how-do-you-do," he reflected. "And it 'as come on me all of a heap. I wonder I never thought. His grace should have a hint. 'Excellent tea,' indeed, and he never touched it! Well, you got nothing out of Adam Hurst, my Lord Marquis of Melton, except what was good for you, 'marrying and that,' what you might call the wrong scent, so to speak. Should 'is grace 'ave a 'int? I'd not like the job!" And for that reason Adam Hurst concluded that it was a case of least said soonest mended.

Platinum returned all in a lather, and Eustace, meeting Melton just back from his ride, with a black look on his face, mistook the reason: "You have—er—heard the news, I see," Eustace said.

"What news?" Melton demanded.

"Why—er—about Ann and—er—Algernon Pointz. The fellow has had the—er—cheek—er—to propose and—er—she has accepted him."

"That rotten fellow!"

"That's what I say," Eustace agreed. "Come and see—er—what we can do. There's the—er—devil—of a row—going on."

The duke had had a stormy interview with Algernon, at whom he had thrown "that Ryecote affair."

Algernon did not deny it. He knew that the better part for the occasion was to play man of the world on the assumption that they were both men of the world with a code in common.

"Well, sir," he said with a shrug, "if that sort of thing

were to stand in the way of a man marrying and settling when he sees the error of his ways, how many of us would be able to marry?"

"It was a damned low business," the duke fenced.

"It was according to usage," Algernon said, attacking again—"the usage of gentlemen. There was no deception and the girl is provided for—at least, she was put in the way of doing well for herself. She had her own ambition. And, after all, she isn't the only girl from this neighbourhood who is showing fine dresses on a fine figure in London just now."

Algernon ostentatiously avoided looking at the duke as he spoke. Instead, he fixed his eyes haphazard on the curtain that covered the portrait of the duke's grandmother. The duke was disconcerted, and showed it; but he had the nerve to make the move a bad one for Algernon.

"Are you insinuating, sir, that a *protégée* of the duchess is in London in the same position as the girl of whom we were speaking?" he demanded.

"I was speaking generally," Algernon hastily lied.

But the duke ignored his denial. "You insinuated that there is something equivocal in Ella Banks's position in London," he insisted severely, comfortable in the belief that at all events that business would bear inquiring into. "I shall inform the duchess."

"Then you will do me a great injustice, sir," Algernon protested, in terror of offending the duchess, in whom was his only hope. He met the duke's eye for a moment as he spoke, then his unsteady glance sought safety once more in the curtain.

The duke showed uneasiness. When he spoke again, after a pause, he was evidently vacillating. "I will consider your proposal," he said curtly, "and consult the duchess. We need not prolong this interview."

Algernon rose, bowed, and withdrew; but with one more glance, accidentally as it happened, at the curtain.

But the duke could not be certain that that last look was accidental, and poor little Lady Ann's fate hung on the doubt in his mind.

There was jubilation at Pointz when it became known that Lady Ann had accepted Algernon and that the duchess was

all in favour of the match. It was believed that the duke's opposition would not last, and everybody was in high delight except the squire. He was a man of honour, the duke was his life-long friend, and, knowing what he did of Algernon, he asked himself what was his duty in the matter? Seeing that he would not have given one of his own daughters to such a man, ought he not to make the duke acquainted with the position of affairs between himself and his son? He decided to see the duke on the subject, and rode over to the Castle for the purpose. It was a painful duty, but he performed it faithfully. Fortunately for Algernon the one point in his career for which no pardon was possible, that "card affair" for which he was rushed by his Regiment, was not known to the squire for a fact. He suspected something serious, but nothing so bad as that. What he thought it right to explain was his intention with regard to the disposition of his property.

"You are taking it for granted probably that Algernon is to be my heir," he said to the duke. "I think it right to tell you that this is by no means certain. As Algernon is at present, idle and extravagant, the property would not be safe in his hands. And I tell you frankly that if he does not live in the future so as to wipe out the causes of complaint that I have had against him in the past, he shall get nothing at my death but an annuity of the same value as the allowance I make him now."

The duke bowed. "I should do the same myself," he said. "I confess that Algernon—as he is at present—is not the man I should have chosen as a husband for Ann. But she is determined, and I can only prevent the marriage until she is of age. In the meantime she may steal a march upon us. We have had instances in the family of young people taking the law into their own hands, as you know. In that case there would be no settlements——"

"It would be serious to have no settlements," said the squire.

The duke's discomfort weighed heavily upon him. His trick of visualising brought back to him vividly that last look of Algernon's, and what he read into it was a threat. He fell back for help on the old-time fallacy which has been responsible for so many unhappy marriages. "Of course, marriage

may be the very thing for Algernon," he said. "Just what he wants to steady him, you know."

"It may," the squire agreed. He also believed in the old-time fallacy, and hopefully welcomed the suggestion. They parted upon this, relieved, but the duke remained undecided.

The duchess, of course, was on what she believed to be the side of the angels. She was all for snatching the brand from the burning. She knew that Algernon had been what she called "wild," but "wild" conveyed to her nothing inexcusable. The word which was Algernon had never been mentioned in her hearing, not even by the duke, who, though no purist in language, always respected her delicacy. She was steeped in the early Victorian tradition; in the belief, that is to say, that the love of a good woman will cure a man of anything. She held that it was the woman's high and holy mission to save the man, but she had never gone into the details of the operation, and had only a vague idea that it was to be done somehow by loving him, obeying him, looking up to him, and sacrificing herself generally to make him comfortable in his own way. Should these high duties also result in a family of children foredoomed to disease and vice, it would be the will of the Lord. She would not have tolerated for a moment the suggestion that such a thing could be foreseen and guarded against; that would have involved the discussion of details to which no nice woman ever alludes.

Ann had been carefully trained in the same tradition. Such knowledge of herself as would have been useful under the circumstances had been scrupulously withheld, so that she was left with nothing but her animal instincts to rely on in the choice of a husband, and was bound to succumb on the conventional lines to the first man who should arouse them. But she was not supposed to have any animal instincts.

Lena put the position bluntly, to the horror of the duchess. "He's a bad lot, your Algernon," she said.

"My dear," said the duchess, "how can you use such expressions! We must always speak of people as we find them. I am sure the dear fellow has always been perfectly delightful to me."

"And to me," Ann echoed fervently.

"He hasn't to me, then," Lena asseverated.

"Dearest Lena, you must have been to blame if he was ever anything but nice to you," the duchess gently accused her. "You do sometimes act in a way! Women do sometimes, and girls; without knowing what they are doing, I am sure. It is deplorable. A man may be drawn on. He is not to blame. I mean a woman's influence should always be for good. It is such a noble thing to save a man's soul."

Ann's eyes glowed with enthusiasm; then suddenly the glow became extinct. The little thing was teachable; and as it was she had flashes of suspicion. "Why do you call him a bad lot, Lena? Why do the boys object to him? Has he ever done anything—*wicked*?"

The duchess gasped. "My dearest, how could he?" she exclaimed. "So young a man! He may have been wild like other young men——"

Ann had a vision of Algernon gambolling down the middle of the street like a frisky colt, without his hat; that was the nearest she could come in her ignorance of life to the meaning of "wildness." The little duchess herself never came much nearer.

"Well, any way, you don't love him, Ann," Lena maintained, neglecting the direct question. She was not steeped in the humanity of the French novelist for nothing, however. She knew what she was talking about. "No girl could love that big Blond Beast. His attraction is all animal. That isn't love at all; it's just a temporary inconvenience. I know—" She stopped short of telling them how she had been cured of the effect of Adnam's coldness by a course of Vincent's adoration.

But the duchess was not to be enlightened. It had never been pointed out to her that when two people are in love with one another they cannot tell whether they love each other or not. Love and "in love" meant the same thing to her. A modern mother understands that "in love" is a transient condition, and if she has her daughter's happiness at heart and sees no hope of love ensuing, she will cure her of her trouble by giving her the pathological explanation of it. The duchess, belonging to the ignorant old days when girls were allowed to "go into a decline" and die of it, was obsessed by the idea that

there was but one cure. Her maternal solicitude inspired the power to appreciate her daughter's feelings. Passion can persuade itself of anything. Ann saw Algernon through the haze of passion which glorifies, an angel actually; and her mother also saw him so, but potentially. Holy matrimony and a good woman's love were necessary to complete the transformation.

"Holy matrimony with Algernon!" Lena ejaculated. "If a man is a brute, holy matrimony gives him the right to behave like a brute. Wait, my dear, till your Algernon has secured the right, and then you will see!"

"My dear," said the duchess, her sense of propriety outraged, "I will not allow you to talk like that. You must not say another word on the subject. Where you get such ideas I cannot imagine. Get your Bibles, my dears, and we will read the Psalms and the lessons."

Lena excused herself.

In the middle of the reading, Lady Ann burst out: "O mother! I must have him! Can't you persuade papa?"

"Yes, dearest," said the duchess confidently. "Your dear father will come round. You will see. Women have great influence—so long as they are true to their own proper sphere. Go on, dear: '*The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, a mother in Israel. . . . And the land had rest forty years.*'"

So they read on to the end of the chapter with great reverence and that refreshment of the spirit which is the reward of reverence; but the lesson stopped short for them at the beautiful fact that Deborah was a mother in Israel; that she managed to be much more besides did not strike them. The little-minded can read this Scripture and still measure the extent of the Woman's Sphere by the limits it suits a mean capacity to impose upon it.

Melton went to his mother, determined to have his mind set at rest. Adam Hurst's involved utterances did not satisfy him. His mother looked up from a note she was writing when he entered the room: "What, Ninian, *dearest!*" she exclaimed. "How nice! One minute and I shall have done."

Ninian walked to a window and stood looking out, head bent, hands behind him, tapping his back with his whip. He

had on a riding suit, and his attitude reminded the duchess of that morning long ago when Ella came to sell her lace. She was determined not to mention Ella, but his will was too strong for her. An accident made it easy for him to introduce the subject. When she rose from the writing-table she found herself caught by the lace of her dress, which had become entangled round the handle of a drawer.

"O Ninian, dear, look! I'm caught," she exclaimed.

He was beside her in a moment, kneeling, the better to see. "You *are* caught, little lady!" he said. "We want Eustace for this. My fingers are no good." Which was true. They were beautiful fingers, but soft and incapable.

But she was not impatient. She was admiring his small dark Brabant head, smooth and glossy, his fine clear skin, the curve of his short moustache, his perfect features. "How very good-looking you are, dear!" she burst out, with a sigh of satisfaction.

He laughed. "I'm afraid the lace is torn," he said. "You must have it mended. Send for your lace-making girls. Do you remember the deal we did together in lace one day?"

She did, and she also remembered that she had borrowed the money from him to pay for the lace, and became alarmed lest he should wish for a return of the loan.

"By the way, how is she getting on?" he asked.

"Oh, very well," she replied, eager to divert his attention. "I sent her away, you know."

He changed colour, and she stopped short, reminded in time of her fears for him, her vague terror of the girl. It flashed upon her that his question was not accidental, and her suspicions were aroused. It was a case for diplomacy, and she hit upon the same suggestion as Adam Hurst. "My object was to give her a chance of marrying. I discussed the best expedient with your dear father. She is unfortunately over-educated for her station—and unless she had gone away could not have married anybody here in a better position. The thing was to get her away, to make a break. I do think our dear Ursula was to blame for spoiling the girl; and Adnam; but one understands his feelings, and Ursula's, as his mother. But of course Ella is exceptional and these things are done. So you see that it is all for the best."

"It is all settled, then?"

"What, dear?"

"This marriage."

"That Ella should marry? Yes, as I tell you. Your dear father is so very good and kind. He understands girls so wonderfully. I never knew him make a mistake. I should never have dared to humour Lena about Her Repose, but you see he knew better."

"You will trust his judgment then with regard to Ann," Melton quietly interposed.

The duchess hesitated. "Er—yes," she said, "when the case has been put to him properly."

The duke, after a few days in town, had just returned, and was shut up in the privacy of his own apartment. He seemed in excellent spirits. He hummed a little and whistled a little and smiled at the pile of letters which had accumulated on his writing-table, but he did not attack them. He meant to, of course, but there was no hurry. He could look into all that sort of thing by and by. He was entitled to a little repose after the journey, and tea and a cigar and a glance at the papers seemed of the first necessity.

But unfortunately for this peaceful pleasant purpose, when the servants brought tea, they let in the duchess also.

"Dearest, why didn't you let me know you had returned?" she exclaimed.

"I—er—I was going to have tea first," he replied.

"We'll have tea together, Darby and Joan!" she declared, all a-flutter, little hands going, very youthful and sprightly. "No, go away"—this to the servants—"I shall pour out tea. Bring another cup."

The duke was all attention. He waited on her, and waited also till she should see fit to unfold the object of her visit. She never intruded for nothing but pure affection.

At last it came out. "Poor dear Ann is so unhappy—quite ill with suspense. I tell her you must have time to consider, but of course you will consent."

"Very wrong of you to encourage any such expectation," he said. "You know my opinion of Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz."

"Yes, dearest, I know," she answered. "At least, I know you are prejudiced. But you will not spoil the dear child's life for a prejudice. She will never get over it. And, after all, what real objection is there to him, apart from the fact that you don't like him? It isn't necessary to like your daughter's husband."

"It is necessary to respect him," he said decidedly.

"But what has he done to forfeit your respect?"

The duke chose the misdemeanor he thought most likely to shock her. "He lured Emily Rycote away, and lied about it—lied about it to you. I heard him myself. He pretended not to know the girl even by sight."

"Then she is a bad girl!" the duchess exclaimed, all her Victorian principles on the alert to defend the poor dear man. "Besides, she wasn't lured away by anybody. She went of her own accord. Hasn't she written and said she is in lucrative employment, using her fine figure to show off dresses?"

The duke's sense of humour betrayed him. He began to walk about the room to keep down a smile.

The duchess rose also, and fluttered about. "And she sent her parents five pounds like a good girl," she proceeded. "His position, you know, is quite good. It is a very fine property."

"The squire threatens to disinherit him."

"I know. But that is merely for discipline. And the squire has been foolish himself—wasteful, you know. But now Seraph Pratt has taken his business in hand, nothing could be better. Algernon says——" The curtain in front of the picture caught her eye. She jerked it aside, and raised her lorgnette. "The Brabant type is unmistakable," she rattled on in the same breath, inconsequently. "I am glad the boys are Brabants. What a lovely woman! Such a haunting face——"

She rattled on, but the duke heard no more until she arrived at her peroration, when she took hold of the lapels of his coat and compelled his attention by the act. "I am sure, dearest," she was saying, "you will not oppose the dear child in this, the dearest wish of her life. There will be no fear of Algernon when he is one of the family. His connection with us will make him careful how he acts. Ann will die if you withhold your consent. I assure you she has eaten nothing for days."

She let go his coat to get at her pocket-handkerchief, and the duke moved away, with a perplexed frown on his face. He stood looking at the portrait for a little, deep in thought, then he covered it with the curtain.

"I must leave it to you," he said at last. "You are her mother, decide for her. I wash—I—er—leave it to you."

There was high festival at the Castle immediately after this. General excitement prevailed. The engagement was announced, and congratulations poured in. The few friends increased to a goodly number of guests, and the thrifty little duchess did an admirable stroke of business with regard to Her Repose. She accepted all the honour of the undertaking with pleasure, but she objected to have all the expense as well, for the upkeep of the establishment was considerable. It was only right, she argued, that the neighbourhood, which enjoyed all the benefit of the hospital, should also contribute to its support. As a hint to the neighbourhood she decided to have a sale of work in the Castle grounds. The neighbourhood was to contribute the work by request, and then come and buy it, the proceeds to be devoted to Her Repose, as advertised. But the duchess knew the world too well to delude herself with the belief that a good object is in itself enough to make people generous. It is expected of charity and virtue nowadays that they should pay, and something in the nature of a commission has to be offered in order to obtain a conspicuous display. There is only one appeal that never fails of its effect, and that is the appeal of rank to the snob. The stalls can be played to as well as the gallery; but you must play up high to the gallery, low down to the stalls. The fête was accordingly to be patronised by Royalty, and the Castle was to be crowded with the associates of Royalty to heighten the general attraction, and also on account of Royalty itself which must have toys provided for its amusement wherever it goes. The arrangements went forward with commendable celerity, and the little duchess complained of being quite worn out with the work; which indeed was evident from the first, for whenever there was anything to be done that she could do, she retired to her own apartments for "a much needed rest," and gave orders that she was not to be disturbed.

These were great days for Mrs. Pointz. She had a right of

entrée to the Castle now as prospective co-mother-in-law with the duchess, and made the most of it. This right perceptibly improved her position in the county, but had no effect upon the squire, who continued to treat her with freezing civility when he chanced to encounter her, but never encountered her at all if he could possibly help it. In public, for the sake of the family, he scrupulously paid her such attention as was due to her position, but he made her feel that it was the forced attention of a gentleman meeting a lady in society whose acquaintance he does not desire; and in spite of the prospective relationship Mrs. Pointz made no way towards intimacy with the duchess either. Lena had faithfully fulfilled the letter of her promise to make the duchess acquainted with Mrs. Pointz's troubles, but in her own way, the result being that the lady's sufferings as they appeared in Lena's description provoked nothing but laughter. No one could be more unhappy than Mrs. Pointz in her efforts to ingratiate herself; if the occasion required delicacy of treatment, she had no delicacy to help her; and if the wrong thing could be said, she was sure to say it—as on one occasion at this time, when a ball was in progress at the Castle, and she found herself standing beside the duchess, looking on. The duchess had recently been in attendance on her Sovereign Lady, and Mrs. Pointz, who was greedy of intimate details, and not aware that to question is an egregious solecism, attempted to satisfy her vulgar curiosity.

“And what hours does she keep?” she asked. “Does she breakfast early?”

The little duchess seemed to rise on her high heels to the roof as she turned on her. “Her Majesty's servants,” she said, “give no information to anybody on any subject whatever that concerns her Majesty.”

But Mrs. Pointz was incurable. She felt the snub at the moment, but the lesson in loyalty was lost upon her, and she made profit of the manner of it only, by doing haughty duchess in imitation to her humble acquaintance whenever opportunity offered; such opportunity as she seized upon, however, being quite unlike the original incident in so far as there was usually no cause of offence.

This ball was the last of the festivities, and it was a brill-

iant affair. The ball-room was gay with uniforms and the scarlet of the local hunt, and there was great animation amongst the girls in consequence. Men had been imported for the occasion, but not enough unfortunately, and the competition for partners was severe. In an interval between two dances Algernon was standing on the rim of the group round the duchess with a brother officer from the Barracks at Close-minster, discussing the guests. They had both had enough champagne.

"Who is the young grand duke keeping it up with four girls at a time, the fair-haired Adonis?" the brother officer asked.

"He answers to the aristocratic name of Adnam," Algernon replied. "Father's a yeoman—decent old chap, old Pratt. That's him coming this way."

"Fine-looking old chap. Grand ducal type seems to be in the family. Who's the pale-faced princess on his arm?"

"Mrs. Pratt—hush, you'll be overheard." He lowered his voice. "*Persona grata* here. See that fellow over there in pink talking to my sister? That's another Pratt, Seraph, half-brother of the young grand duke, but quite a different breed. Seraph's weedy, but he's not a crock, and I'm his most obliged humble servant. He's my father's acting aide-de-camp at present; making things hum at Pointz. My governor had dropped a bit behind the times. It's these Pratt sort of chaps that are all up to date. That fellow, Seraph, is making money for me hand over hand, I'm assured."

"Fine lot, that old yeoman stock. Pity they're dying down."

"Dying down, my dear fellow!" Algernon rejoined. "Living up high, I should say! Why, that lot will all be esquires in about a fortnight. Look at them here to-night!"

"This is a charity affair, it doesn't count."

"It does with that lot, though, I assure you," Algernon insisted. He changed the subject. "What price girls to-night, eh? Price uniform, I should say, and army or navy for choice. The civilians are all out of it."

"The young grand duke there can hardly be said to be out of it." Adnam's critic twisted his moustache irritably. "They're regularly fawning on him, those girls, it's sickening——"

"On account of his grand ducality, I suppose! Well, every woman has her price——"

"Not in the sense you mean," he was promptly contradicted by Lena, whom he had overlooked at his elbow. "A woman's price as a rule is a decent man, an honourable position, and the respect of the world."

"Dear Miss Malapert with her chin in the air, throwing pearls in the proverbial direction, as usual, without in the least knowing, without pausing for a moment to appraise their value," a quiet voice from behind commented.

Lena flashed round on the speaker. It was a little man in ordinary evening dress but with a broad riband across his chest. He had come in through the vestibule behind them, unannounced. The duchess, with an exclamation of pleasure, held out a welcoming hand, which he kissed. He had shaved off his beard, but Lena recognised him by his voice.

"*Mickleham!*" she cried as soon as she could speak. "*Mickleham!*" She seized his hands and shook them violently. The duchess interposed. "Dear Lena, is this seemly?" she said. "You are shaking the prince to pieces."

"Prince?" Lena questioned, flinging his hands away from her, and standing off to stare at him. Then, grasping the situation she exclaimed, in another tone, "Prince! There! I always said so! A fairy prince! The best prince in the world. But be Mickleham too. Mickleham the well-beloved. We can't do without him. But, oh!" she clasped her hands, "what an opportunity you've lost! You should have flashed in upon us all by yourself, in a blaze of limelight, a prince in full splendour, with all your styles and titles announced in a stentorian voice by a varlet in crimson and gold."

"That would have been so like him!" Ursula Pratt remarked. She had joined the group on the outbreak of the commotion.

"There is limelight enough and to spare wherever you are, Miss Malapert," the prince said playfully.

Mrs. Pointz had also turned at the sound of the prince's voice, and stood staring at him with her mouth half open, dumfounded. He noticed her now. "Duchess," he said, "present me, if you please."

"To Mrs. Pointz? Yes, of course—if I may?"

Mrs. Pointz seemed to acquiesce. "Prince Aubon Strel-

letzen—Mrs. Pointz—our dear Countess Ursula's brother, you know, the present head of the family."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Pointz before, in her own house," the prince remarked, "though doubtless she has forgotten such a trifling circumstance." He caught sight of the squire at this moment. "And the squire too! I see you remember me," he exclaimed. They shook hands cordially.

If Mrs. Pointz could have writhed like a serpent in pain it would have been a relief to her feelings. She attacked the squire when she caught him alone.

"You knew," she cried, "you knew all along."

"Well, yes," he answered complacently. "At least, I made a very good guess. He puzzled me first of all by dropping into expressions which no workman could have used. But it was the Goya that gave him away. He did very well up to that time, although I had already detected a distinction of manner that made me suspicious. But it was his enthusiasm when he caught sight of the Goya that gave me the clue. I knew of him as a great collector, and I also knew that he was mad on agriculture and the people and all that sort of thing, and had been pottering about the country, picking up information. I had only to put two and two together, and naturally arrived at a pretty accurate guess. But of course I respected his incognito."

"And gave me away, equally of course," she said bitterly; "a most manly, most gentlemanly thing to do!"

"My dear lady, you gave yourself away," he chuckled, "in spite of the efforts we both made to prevent you."

The prince drew Lena's hand through his arm and led her across the room. "Come," he said, "and present me to my late courteous and considerate employer."

"Adnam," Lena called imperatively. "Adnam, come here and be presented to Mickleham—excuse me—to your uncle, Prince Aubon Strelletzen."

Adnam stared in stupefaction, but almost instantly recovered himself, clicked his heels together, and made his ancestral bow. He was disconcerted, but his habitual courtesy and self-control were proof against the very natural surprise he felt, and he did the right thing automatically. Race tells in an

emergency. Adnam did not come of a long line of courtiers and diplomats for nothing.

The prince smiled approval. "You are an Aubon Strelletzen too," he said.

"So I have been told," Adnam answered gravely.

He had an explanation with his mother afterwards. She told him how she and her brother, the last of the younger branch of the family, had been left orphans and almost peniless in their youth, and their refusal of the offer of the then head of the house to adopt them, because of the condition attached, that they should become Roman Catholics. Both had, accordingly, to work for their living: "My good angel inspired me to offer myself to the duchess as governess to her little boys," she said. "You know the end of that story! Happy end! My brother drifted away to the English Colonies."

"But why did you never tell me I had an uncle?" Adnam asked.

"Dear Adnam, did it never occur to you that my brother was your uncle?" she asked smiling. "I have often talked to you about him and our childhood together. I have known very little about him since then. He does not shine as a regular correspondent, and, once he understood that I was comfortably settled and happy, I seldom heard from him, and often did not know where he was. It is a quarter of a century since we parted, and in the meantime the elder branch has died out altogether and he has become head of the family. That brought him back from the Colonies where he had made a large fortune. He is a man of many hobbies now, among which are agriculture and philanthropy. He came to England to inquire into the condition of the country and of the working people, but he found it difficult, as a prince, to obtain any information that was not one-sided, so he began to tramp about as a working-man. He had had enough practical experience abroad in his youth to enable him to play the part well. He made for this county with the intention of looking me up, and saw your advertisement, and he determined to make our acquaintance as an applicant for employment. Then he became interested in you and in your enterprise. I did not recognise him, and he only made himself known to me that evening when he played the violin. The duke had met him

abroad and recognised him that day when you were showing him over the Orchard. The duchess I told. Fusty Ginger also recognised him. He had waited on him once at a public dinner in London and heard him speak, but the poor fellow did not betray him. Your uncle has the power which is before everything valuable in his position; he commands both love and loyalty."

"Did my father know?" Adnam asked.

"Of course," his mother answered. "I keep nothing from your father. The squire also had his suspicions and questioned your father, but of course he did not press the question when your father evaded it, and he also was discreet."

"I think I might have been trusted too," Adnam said.

She did not answer immediately. She had been for trusting Adnam all along, but her brother wanted to see the stuff the lad was made of, and he was afraid of the effect of his own position.

"He became deeply interested in you and in your enterprise, as I tell you," she said at last, "and that was why he stayed. He wanted to help you, but in his own way. And he did help you, dear."

"Did he!" Adnam answered dryly.

"Think, dear! You have consulted me yourself often about advice he had given you."

Adnam reflected. A thought of Lena crossed his mind. It seemed irrelevant at first, but presently it connected itself with the duchess and his uncle and his father, and he remembered the events of that afternoon when Lena— Her subsequent conduct had put everything else out of his head, and he had not followed up the clue, but his own sleepy retrospect recurred to him now. He had never thought of consulting Mickleham, but somehow—how had it happened? Whenever a difficulty arose, there was Mickleham touching on the topic, accidentally as it seemed, and putting him right without appearing to advise.

"He certainly did put me up to several wrinkles," Adnam acknowledged at last, somewhat grudgingly.

A clever young man is not disposed to be pleasant just after awakening to the fact that he has been rather a blind ass, and it cannot be expected of him that he should be ready at the moment to express himself generously towards the one

by whom he has been hoodwinked, even when he knows that the object of the hoodwink has been attained and has turned out greatly to his advantage. His mother smiled at his reply, but said nothing. She left him to make up his account and to calculate for himself how much he owed his uncle, a wise proceeding. It is only when we make up the account ourselves that our debts of gratitude become urgent upon us for settlement.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ball was the last of the festivities at the Castle. Immediately after it most of the guests departed, and the family settled down to have what the duchess called "a delightfully quiet time."

Preparations for Ann's marriage were at once set on foot. Active opposition had died down. Having washed his hands of all responsibility in the matter, the duke merely looked on, a detached observer, and "the boys" were perforce obliged to follow his lead. It was upon Colonel Kedlock that the onus of the whole business fell, and well he discharged his trust. With regard to Ann's fortune, for one thing, he was inflexible. It must be strictly tied up, he insisted. Algernon acquiesced with perfect grace. The duchess said it was "so sweet of him! Many a man would have objected." Captain Algernon did very much object, but he was not so tactless as to show it. Besides, well he knew who would have the spending of the very considerable income. Settlements do not protect a wife from that sort of depredation. A man who can play on a woman's heartstrings has always the key to her cash box.

Colonel Kedlock was a man who worked to the limit of his strength whatever his occupation, whether business or pleasure, and he was a chronic sufferer from the strain; but he had a secret source of relief upon which he was accustomed to rely whatever happened. He had recourse to it at joyous times to prolong the pleasure, as well as in times of trouble to deaden the pain. He kept it in a bottle. The bottle he kept in his room with the modest intention of making no public display of his fondness for it. Unfortunately, caution is a delicate

tool with an edge that is easily blunted, and Colonel Kedlock's caution was always in danger of suffering from carelessness on his part, although he knew that, once dropped, it becomes useless. He had been disturbed in his regular habits by the prolonged festivities at the Castle. Instead of retiring to his own rooms as was his wont immediately after dinner, he had had to stay and do his share of entertaining the numerous guests; and the duty of taking something himself to keep a guest in countenance, too often devolved upon him. The danger of this duty for him was that it was also a pleasure; therefore he was under the temptation not to perform it perfunctorily.

Late one night, just at the door of his own apartment, he was encountered by Melton and Eustace, also presumably on their way to bed.

"That you, boys?" he said. "Come in and keep me company. I must have a cigarette to make me sleep. These hours play the devil with my nights. Once in a way is nothing, but night after night! You'll find it out when you're my age. Come in. I've not had a chance of a talk with either of you lately. This is luck, you know. Two birds with one stone. And there's the devil of a lot to discuss. Little Ann——"

He had opened the door and ushered them in as he spoke.

The large comfortable room reflected his tastes and habits both in his hours of ease and at busy times. His office was in another part of the Castle, but a large writing-table, covered with packets of papers, vouched for the fact that he was not idle even here. Facing one of the windows, which was open, was a high-backed grandfather chair. On a table beside it a French novel was lying open, apparently left there by some one who intended to return to it immediately. Near the fireplace another table was set out with syphons, cigars, and decanters. On this table was the only light in the room, a large lamp, its radiance pleasantly subdued by a green shade. Colonel Kedlock invited the young men to help themselves, and at the same time liberally helped himself, to whisky and soda. They followed his example, but only with the soda-water. Then all three stretched themselves in easy-chairs, and lighted cigarettes. The great chair in the window was left with its back turned upon them unsociably.

Colonel Kedlock drank off his first whisky and soda at a draught, and half another, remarking unnecessarily that he was damned thirsty. All the time he talked, only giving his guests a chance to get in a word now and then. His garrulousness, which was unwonted, surprised them at first, but it also gave them leisure to observe him, and after the second whisky and soda and part of a third, the reason of it became painfully apparent.

The colonel's mood was unsteady. He had used Lady Ann's name as a bait to lure them in, but he forgot her as soon as they were seated, and began about a private grievance of his own.

"I was out there looking for Lena," he said. "Where is she?" He frowned at the innocent brothers as if he suspected them of having abducted her.

"Gone to bed, it's to be hoped," Melton answered. "Look at the time!"

"Gone to bed? That's just it," said the colonel, solemnly shaking his head. "Gone to bed without saying good-night—my only child!"

He was much affected by the reflection that she was his only child, and repeated the statement. He fancied he was making a touching display of paternal tenderness. It seemed highly important to him that he should make a good impression, for he had a vague feeling that the brothers might observe something unusual in his manner which would impress them unfavourably. He immediately discounted his assumption of the rôle of devoted parent, however, by adding fretfully: "Selfish, I call it. She knew I should want her to read to me. I always want her every night. Selfish, *I* call it. What do you call it?" he asked of Eustace abruptly.

"I call it very late," Eustace answered with pacific intent.

"Late? What has late to do with it?" the colonel demanded irritably. "I want her, that's enough." Then he added with great precision, under the impression that much depended upon their understanding the explanation, "I want her to read to me. Look at that chair there in the window—that's her chair. I give it up to her entirely." He paused to reflect upon his own goodness, and became sentimental. "Her empty chair!" he exclaimed, "with its back to me!" He felt it insulting of the chair to have turned its back on

him. "I could kick it," he said tragically. Then his grievance recurred to him. "Late is it?" he demanded. "I want her all the more." He perceived a new significance in the words when he had uttered them. He forgot why he wanted her, and thought it was because he loved her. "My only child!" he groaned, "and she is ungrateful. How am I to get to sleep?"

The brothers exchanged glances, each expecting the other to do something decided; but the colonel was off again, harking back to another grievance, before they had resolved on a course of action.

"There's little Ann, too, and that putrid fellow," he recommenced. "What the devil old Ninny means by it, God only knows! But Ninny he was when we were boys together at Eton, and Ninny he'll be to the end—Ninian August George Albert Trevelyan Brabant, Marquis of Melton, but Ninny to us. You can't cure him of it. And I was Lucy—Lucian Kedlock, you know—man of property then. I've had my troubles—yes—I do assure you." He sipped his whisky and soda and grieved about his troubles silently for a little, then burst out again: "They called me Lucy at Eton. Ninny does still. You've heard him."

This was true, and the fact somehow wiped out the indignity of the "Ninny," so they let it pass.

"Mind you, I'm not saying anything against him," Colonel Kedlock pursued with impressive rectitude. "I always liked him. A right good sort if he is a ninny. Let me tell you, boys, you can be both at once." He made this explanation carefully, under the impression that he was letting in light on a point which had hitherto been left inexcusably obscure. "He stood by me like a brick, I tell you." He shook his head at them severely, as if they had expressed a doubt of the fact. "And, damn it, I'll stand by him—to the last. I've always stood by him. No man wash—" the colonel's tongue began to trip in spite of great care on his part in the enunciation of difficult words—"was," he corrected himself. "No man was ever better advised. When he married, who was it said to him, '*That for a duchess!*'"

"You are not speaking of my mother, I presume?" Melton put in haughtily.

The colonel collected himself cunningly.

"Your mother, eh, what?" he said. "Good little woman, your mother. Nice little woman. Pretty too. Keepsh looks wonderfully. Bombus, though, now." He described an arc with his hands downwards over his lean abdomen. "Indolence. Tha'sh fatal t' figure." He had begun with the intention of being tactfully reserved, but in his state it is proverbial that the truth will out. "Not wise, either," he solemnly stated as if he were performing a public duty. "Neurotic. Regular little fool," he summed up clearly. "I say it to you, but, mind you, I wouldn't say it to everybody."

Melton made a movement as if to rise. The colonel understood it and stopped him peremptorily. There was a threat of violence in his manner now; it would obviously be dangerous to provoke him. Eustace restrained his brother with a gesture, and formed the word "Patience!" with his lips.

"Listen to me, you young jackanapes," the colonel insisted. "It's my duty to tell you." He went on in the careful tone of one who is conscientiously doing his duty. "Your father, I tell you, would have done better to marry with you in his eye. If Platinum's mother had been no better chosen for breeding purposes than yours, Platinum wouldn't have been any good either. Tole him so myself. Waxshy—waxy at the time, he was. Now he tellsh me, 'There's more in breedin',' he says, 'than in birth.' Breeding isn't all manners. Constitushon's got to be considered. Good blood doesn't mean blue blood; it means pure blood. New blood. Nothing but old blood in our class. No new blood to be got in our class. In-and-in has played old Harry with Roy'lty and arish—aristoc-rashy all over Europe. Only thing to save 'em now crossh—cross-breeding. Handsome healthy young mothers from lower class! That's the thing—our salvation.' He's going to look into it when he has time, ole Ninny is! That's ole Ninny all over—always going to!" The colonel became pleasantly confidential. "But—do him justice—always had a taste that way himself. Not for marrying though, mind you; I don't say that. But ripe plums!" The colonel smacked his lips. "Plums in the people's gardens, I call 'em." This seemed to him extraordinarily witty and he chuckled. Then, realising himself as an experienced man of the world giving wise advice to his juniors, he became gravely impressive. "I don't say

pick 'em off your neighbour's trees. That wouldn't be moral. Just wait with your mouths open, my dear boys, and ripest plumsh'll fall into 'em. Ole Ninny——"

The young men jumped up simultaneously. The colonel also staggered to his feet.

"Whatsh up?" he said.

"We can't listen—" Melton began angrily.

"Can't listen!" the colonel jeered. "*You—can't—listen!*" He walked up to Melton threateningly. "Who are you, I'd like to know?" he shouted. "Can't listen? Must listen! I mean—to speak."

"Speak like a gentleman then," Eustace got out in an authoritative tone; with a whisper to Melton: "Must humour him or—er—the devil of a row."

Colonel Kedlock loose in the Castle in that state would be a catastrophe. Their impulse was to protect the household; also they felt that they must protect him. He had been an institution in the family as long as they could remember anything. He had nursed them when they were in petticoats, swung them up in the air to look at them when they got into suits, patted them on the back when they appeared as men in Eton jackets. They had always regarded him with affection, and respected him in much the same way as they respected their father. Their first feeling therefore on seeing him in this state was to excuse him. The old chap was "the worse," but no one in the Castle was as usual just then. They took it for granted that the lapse was accidental. Obviously he had gone too far to pull up now. They had better see him through and safe in bed. No one but themselves need be any the wiser. Also there was Lena. If she should come—! That decided them. They must stay as policemen to keep the peace. The next stage could not be far off, and might be more manageable if not less disgusting. He was helping himself again. The immediate result was tranquillising. First he pushed them back into their chairs jocosely. Then he forced them to take cigarettes, and began, with great gravity, to strike matches, swaying backwards and forwards as he stood. When he succeeded in striking a match, which was only after many futile attempts to hit the box, instead of giving one of them a light, he threw the match down and left it to burn itself out wherever

it chanced to fall, until at last Eustace, in fear of fire, dexterously relieved him of the box, and got him back into his chair. There he reclined, quiescent for a little, with knitted brow, making an effort to think.

"I was saying," he resumed at last, thickly, "Ann, you know, and that putrid fellow. Poor little Ann! I love her. Always loved her. Gentle little thing. Can't think what Ninny's about. Lace, I suppose——"

"What's that about lace?" Melton demanded sharply.

His tone startled Colonel Kedlock, and brought on a lucid interval. "Connoisseur, you know," he explained. "Got a lovely piece for Ann the other day." The mention of Ann brought on a relapse. "Putrid fellow," he muttered. "Rather marry my daughter to well-bred dog. Dog—gentleman. Ann's fool, of course. Always was. Now, *my* daughter"—he drew himself up—"my daughter, Lena—only child." This desolate fact moved him deeply. He sighed and shook his head. "Different? Rather! She's no fool. Little devil, if you like. Same as her mother." This was added philosophically. "A Brabant and a beauty, her mother. Lord, the jealousy when I carried her off!" He paused to enjoy a retrospective triumph. "She didn't run straight, though. I don't mind telling you—all over now, you know, long go—not that it ever mattered to me—much. And Lena—Lena won't run straight either. But she's no fool. Trust her! She means to land the biggest fish in the matrimonial market. She will, too, egad! Capable? By God, you bet! *She'll* land her fish. A dukedom? A principality, sir. Seen her with that chap Strelletzen? Good play that. I taught her. Look at her? You tell me she can't play the game of catch 'em, eh? You're a fool, sir. She knows every turn of it. And look at her points—her figure. *Fausse maigre*, eh? By Jove, I can tell you! If she doesn't catch 'em with her eyes, she'll catch 'em with her tongue; and if that's not enough, why, good Lord! she's game to strip. That's my Lena—only child."

The colonel groped about for his handkerchief. Tears were streaming from his eyes, he was so overcome with pride and tenderness.

Then suddenly, with an impulsive crash, the big chair in the window was flung aside, and Lena, still in her evening dress of

white satin and pearls, with a light shawl falling from her shoulders, stood revealed—rigid, her lips compressed, her eyes fixed on her father; strength and determination expressed in her whole pose, but no emotion.

Under the compelling fixity of her gaze, her father pulled himself together. The startling shock of her unexpected appearance had sobered him enough to make him feel that something was wrong, and that he himself was somehow that something. He tried to dodge her eyes by glancing to this side and that, but they held him. He tried with a fatuous smile to make it appear that she was welcome. He tried to say something agreeable, but only accomplished the utterance of a few facetious, disconnected words about "bedtime" and "little girls." Then he gave it up and waited, with drawn white face and high red nose, for whatever might be in store for him.

She came forward upon that, easily and naturally, as if there were nothing unusual in the occasion; but she never for a moment released her father from the hold her eyes had upon him. The two young men had started to their feet as soon as they recovered from the surprise of her dramatic appearance, and now stood hesitating, not knowing what to do for the best. Delicacy prompted them to leave the room; chivalry urged them to stay and protect her. And chivalry prevailed until further orders.

Lena stood by her father's chair and looked down at him. Her dark eyes glittered. The glint of sapphire in them, gem-like, liquid, was peculiarly evident. He smiled up at her affably, but trepidation showed in his unsteady mouth.

"If the servants saw your nose," she said, in her ordinary easy, even, mellow tone, "they'd send for the fire engine."

"Vulgarity!" he ejaculated, running all his words together. "Where-d'y-get-it? 'Clare to God's not my fault. M'only child!"

"No, you're not vulgar," she replied in her easiest conversational tone. "It is another fault of yours that has turned to vulgarity in me. The taste which makes you like whisky reappears in the vulgarity of your only child. Your nose is crimson. I must powder it."

Without taking her eyes off him, she fumbled in a little gold bag that hung on her arm, and took out a powder-box. He

watched the movements of her hands unconcernedly, as a man watches and waits while his valet performs some accustomed duty of the toilet.

"Look," she said, holding the mirror in the lid of the box so that he could see his nose in it.

"Sad sight," he muttered, then pillowed his head on the back of the chair comfortably, and shut his eyes to keep the powder out of them. She shook a cloud from the puff as she whitened his nose.

"There," she said, "the ravages are repaired. Look at yourself restored to beauty."

She held the little mirror above his upturned face, so that he could see himself without moving his head.

"Ruin—badly rishtored," he pronounced himself. It seemed to him terribly pathetic that he should be a ruin badly restored. He tried to think of some remedy, gazing into the mirror the while fixedly. Lena continued to hold it at the right angle, an awkward one for her arm. Her patience was inexhaustible, but at last she lost control of her muscles, her hand wavered and the glass flashed in the lamplight. The colonel closed his dazzled eyes. She waited, watching him as a nurse watches a patient at an anxious crisis. His eyelids flickered. She made downward strokes with the powder puff on his face, streaking it ludicrously with the powder in parallel bars; but she was too intently concentrated on the task she had set herself to be conscious of this trivial detail.

The brothers from the first had been too much astonished to be amused. It was not amusing either; there was too much intention in the farce. They perceived that she was not playing, that her words were chosen designedly, like a conjurer's patter, to divert the mind of her subject from the real business in hand. By degrees they divined her purpose and held their breath. The noises of the night, floating in through the open window, made a background to the silence of the room.

Deftly she substituted her hand for the powder-puff to make the passes. The colonel, under the impression that he had made the necessary suggestions for his proper restoration, and was having them carried out, passively submitted. It was not long, though it seemed so, before she ventured to lay her fingers lightly on his eyelids. She waited a little; then stepped back;

watched him a moment, and listened intently to his breathing. He did not move again. He was fast asleep.

She turned to the young men then, and explained in a whisper: "He was very late coming up to-night, and I was so tired I fell sound asleep. I did not hear you come in. When I awoke he'd got beyond the first stage at which I can manage him. I had to wait for the tears. They always come after he has chattered or raged long enough to exhaust himself. Then I get him to sleep, and Brooks comes. He's better when he wakes, and glad to be put to bed. Better leave me now."

She had rung while she was speaking, and her father's man, an old servant, came quickly in answer to the summons.

The young men noiselessly slipped away. They walked together to the end of the long corridor in silence. Eustace went on downstairs, Melton turned off to his own rooms.

Before they separated, Eustace exclaimed:

"That poor little girl—how awful!"

"Yes, good Lord!" Melton ejaculated. "I never suspected——"

Eustace went to his sitting-room. Sleep was out of the question. He turned up the lamp and opened one of the French windows which looked out on to the broad grey terrace. It was a black night outside. The darkness, opaque as a wall, seemed to block up the window. Eustace sat with his elbows on his writing-table, his face covered with his hands, and tried to think; but he could only recollect. Over and over again certain parts of the scene he had just witnessed re-enacted themselves in his mind interminably; and would not be banished. The crash of the big chair flung aside; the trivial detail that Lena's neck was as white as her pearls; certain phrases, offensive to his taste; Colonel Kedlock stretched out in the easy-chair asleep. He saw him lying there, the lean body, as upright as a rule, prone and inert; the long bony hands stretched out on either arm of the chair; the face with its dry skin like a dead leaf, criss-crossed with innumerable fine lines, and the tired look it always wore, accentuated rather than softened by sleep—that look which expresses the fatigue of an old family doomed to decadence and death, from exhaustion. The fatigue had told on Colonel Kedlock, first symptom of the decadence which had not yet appeared in his generation but was

bound to be evident in the next. Eustace saw the symptom with his mind's eye, but the inward significance, of which it was the outward and visible manifestation, was lost upon him for want of a clue. To one seeing or suffering from a disease of which he has never heard, the most marked symptoms are useless for the purpose of a diagnosis. What he did see was the unmistakable breeding, the high-caste marks, which characterised Colonel Kedlock's whole appearance. The beauty of the Brabant brothers themselves may be seen among fastidious, delicately nurtured young men in any of the cultivated classes. Colonel Kedlock was without beauty, but he had the points which distinguished the peculiar exclusiveness of his own caste. Street urchins would have yelled after him, "Yah, aristocrat!" if they had known enough. To Eustace there was reassurance in this dominant trait. It stood for certain graces of demeanour, vouched for certain qualities and principles, which would determine the man's conduct under special circumstances. He gave condensed expression to this reassurance in one excusing phrase: "Still and withal, he is a gentleman."

Eustace had noticed the blackness of the night without thinking of it, but now, as he sat there with his head in his hands, he became aware of it without seeing it, as something threatening—a blackness that might pour in upon him and overwhelm him, if it were not held back. And what was there to hold it back?—With some intention of rising to shut the window, he looked up. Darkness no longer filled the aperture. There was nothing of it now but a rim; a black frame round a white figure. Eustace, startled, kept his seat.

"Lena!" he gasped.

"May I come in?" she pleaded pitifully. "Let me come in and talk for a little. I'm all cold and shivery and miserable."

He was on his feet now, stammering a welcome. It seemed quite natural that she should come to him in the small hours of the night to be warmed and comforted. "Why, of course, come in!" he got out, quite fluently for him. "I'll shut the window. It is chilly. Shall I get you a—er—warmer wrap?"

"This is enough, thank you," she said, drawing her shawl closer about her.

He shook up the cushion in an easy-chair and held it until she leant back against it.

"That comfy?" he said. "Now a footstool."

He put one under her little white satin shod feet. Then he sat down on the swivel-chair at his writing-table, and looked at her with the natural satisfaction of a man pleased with his own work.

"What a good sort you are, Eustace!" she said gently. "You are always doing something kind for me, and I've never done anything for you in my life but torment you."

"Oh, come now," he answered, divining in his delicacy that the best thing for her was to raise her in her own estimation; "you forget. What sort of a fellow was I till you took—er—took me in hand—er—gave it me. You have—er—you've done more for me than anybody—er—you know."

"I?" she asked, genuinely surprised.

"Yes—you," he answered. "Er—don't you remember? when I knocked that cow over—how you talked to me? I declare I'd no notion—I'd never thought—er—put myself in poor people's shoes—er—you know, and all that kind of thing—till you—er—made me. You started me—thinking—and, er—I've been thinking, er—ever—since."

She put the credit aside with a little gesture. "Nonsense," she said. "If it hadn't been in you to think unselfishly, no one could have made you think."

He differed from her there with a shrug.

They were silent for a little, he toying with a paper-knife on the table beside him, she perusing the ground.

At last she looked up. "I've been pretty well dragged through the mud," she said.

He was too sincere to deny it. "But that sort of mud," he assured her—"mud thrown at you, falls off of itself. The mud that—er—sticks—is the mud we get into ourselves."

"You will always think of me as up for sale to the highest bidder."

"Nothing of the kind," he answered decidedly. "You are no puppet-girl. You would never consent." Very carefully he got the words out. "I shall always think of you—as you are—rather naughty, er, you know—but good. Loyal—none more so. You never—complained—said a word—about all this."

"I couldn't give him away, you know."

"No—you could not. But most girls in such a—hell—I

beg your pardon—with such a—such a—skeleton—in the cupboard—would have let us know! Ninian and I had—had no idea of it. I'm sure my father—has no idea of it. And as for the Little Lady—! If she knew! But this must be the end of it.”

“There will be no end to it as long as he lives. It would be too strong for him even if he tried. And he doesn't try. He never will. It's his one pleasure in life. He says so, and thinks that that fully justifies the indulgence. ‘Other people,’ he says, ‘have their prejudices on the subject. I respect their prejudices as a gentleman should. I do not share their prejudices on the subject, but I make no parade of the fact. I leave them in peace to their water and retire in private to my whisky. That is the proper thing for a gentleman to do under the circumstances. In my young days it was just the reverse, but men were men in my young days. Now they are milksops. And times have changed. The *kudos* is for the water drinkers now. I don't join in the applause, but neither do I hiss. I simply retire. I escape from the times and live my life in strict seclusion—the life of a man and a gentleman.’”

Eustace heard Colonel Kedlock in every word. How many times must such sentiments have been repeated in her presence, to impress them like that on her mind! It made him miserable to think of it. “Poor little girl!” he exclaimed.

“Don't,” she remonstrated. “Sympathy acts on the tear-ducts disastrously. I tell you there is nothing to be done.”

“Yes, there is,” he insisted firmly. “You can be taken away—out of it all.”

“How and when and where?” she asked ironically.

“Lena—, Lena, come here.”

He reached for her hands as he spoke, drew her to him, and made her sit on his knee.

“Kiss me,” he said.

“That's no way out of it,” she objected, half laughing to hide her confusion. She had often sat on his knee before, stormed it, and made him kiss her; but this was very different.

“It is a way out of it,” he said—“if you love me.”

“All the love to be on my side?”

“If you love me,” he carefully repeated, “as much as I love you.”

Her heart expanded. Never in her life had words thrilled her so pleasurably as these. With her head on his shoulder, she gave herself up to the feeling for a little. He pressed his lips to her soft fair hair, and gave her time. Her kindness was her conscience, and she did appreciate his goodness. Could she, therefore, knowing herself as she was, could she? Would it be fair?

"I should not make you happy, Eustace," she said at last. "Remember what he said——"

"Old beast that he is," Eustace inwardly commented; aloud he replied: "There is no question of making me happy." He gathered her up closer in his arms. "My happiness will be—er—to make you—happy. I shall be happy—quite—if you will let me take you—out of all this."

"Would you?" she asked, wavering. "Would you take me?"

"At once. To-morrow if it could be done."

She sat up and began to twist the ends of his moustache, still thinking. Then she offered him her lips. The act was sacramental to him; to her it signified the arrival at a foregone conclusion. Yet she did care for him with most sincere affection.

Grey dawn had dissipated the darkness by this time, and presently, beyond the balustrade of the terrace, low down in the sky, there gleamed the first faint rose of the rising sun.

"What must the time be?" Lena exclaimed, disengaging herself from the comfort of his arms. "Just look at us!"

They did look rather disreputable, still dressed for the evening, but with all the evening freshness gone. They looked at each other and laughed.

"I didn't dream," he said, "when I saw you come down in that dress last night——"

"Neither did I!" she assured him.

"But you must be worn out," he began again with great concern. "I ought to have thought—you must let me get you something—er—some wine?"

"You know I never take it," she reminded him. "And now you know why."

Inwardly anathematising himself for his forgetfulness, and flushing crimson by way of apology, he hastily suggested tea.

"At this time of day?" She smiled at the impossibility.

"You shall have some tea," he promised her, "I'll get it for you somehow. Go to your room, and I'll bring it to you there. See if I—er—don't."

There was an air of proprietorship about this that pleased her. She felt already how good it was, and what a rest, to have him for her own to rely upon. She was on her way to the window by which she had entered from the terrace, and looked back at him over her shoulder, with a bewitching expression. "Bring it, do," she said; "and bless you for thinking of it! Tea will save my life. If in difficulties, by the way, apply to the night watchman."

She fled from the terrace and re-entered the Castle by a window which should have been closed and fastened with shutters and bolts—(Eh, what, night watchman?).

The night watchman made the tea.

CHAPTER XXXV

ANN'S marriage was to take place at Castlefield Saye: "So much more sacred," the little duchess said, "here in the beautiful country with no wicked world to intrude." Some weeks had passed, and the day was approaching. Eustace had absented himself of late, but no special notice was taken of this. He was supposed to be attending to regimental duties. The duke also was a good deal away, in London. Parliament was sitting, and the duchess frequently accounted for his absence to her own entire satisfaction: "Your dear father is so conscientious about his public duties," she said, adding hastily; "and of course about his private duties too."

"Your dear father" invariably returned in good spirits, apparently much refreshed by his work. He had fits of abstraction, when he would hum a little or whistle a little, absently; and then, becoming aware of what he was doing, he would burst out with interesting items of news to cover the lapse. No one would have supposed, in those days, that he had ever known what it was to feel lonely and depressed.

Lena was diligently devoted to the sick at Her Repose—

"Too much so," her father grumbled. "She'll be catching something, and then we shall know!"

He said this at luncheon one day, when she had not put in an appearance.

"She has not been at Her Repose this morning," the duke remarked. "I've just come from there myself."

"Where is she then?" Colonel Kedlock asked. "Making herself cheap all over the place as usual, I suppose. What young ladies are coming to— John!" he called to one of the servants irritably. "Where is Miss Kedlock? Go and inquire."

"Miss Kedlock's gone to Closeminster, sir," the man replied stolidly. "Driving herself. I saw her off. Very early, sir."

"Doing some shopping, no doubt, to vary the monotony," the duke opined. This was so likely, everybody was satisfied.

But presently a commotion was heard without.

"There she is!" Ann exclaimed.

The door was flung wide, and a servant, under compulsion, announced with a gasp: "Lord and Lady Eustace Brabant."

There was a moment of stupefied silence, then the duchess cried, with her little hands all a-flutter: "How naughty you are, Lena, *dear!* You should not, you know. Such a trick! Not funny at all."

But the pair did not look as if they intended it to be funny. Eustace was evidently embarrassed, and Lena, very pink and shamefaced. Melton leaped to the right conclusion at once, and the duke the moment after.

They sat down side by side. Lena toyed nervously with the only ring on her left hand. It shone conspicuously new and bright, claiming general attention.

"That's a wedding-ring!" the little duchess exclaimed, in a horrified tone.

Colonel Kedlock started up, his face black with rage, but before he could utter a word Lena recovered herself. "After luncheon, Paternal Relative," she said coolly. He walked out of the room. "Scene postponed," she remarked generally. "And if you are not going to congratulate us, at least give us something to eat."

Little Ann began to cry. "It *is* unkind," she exclaimed, jumping up impulsively and going round the table to embrace

the culprits. "Mamma, it might have been me if—" She looked at her father. "I'm very glad, Lena dearest. I'm sure you will be happy. Eustace is—is such a dear." She had an arm round the neck of each, and knocked their heads together in her nervous anxiety to share her good wishes equally between them.

Melton also had risen. He shook his brother's hand long and cordially, kissed Lena, and returned to his seat without a word. He understood. Eustace had done his best for Lena. Eustace was such a good sort.

The duke decided to be a good sort too for the occasion. "Champagne," he ordered curtly.

When the glasses were filled, he raised his, and stood up. "Our kindest congratulations, our best wishes," he said. "I speak for your mother and myself, Eustace, and all here—er—I am sure (hear, hear). May you both be very happy. I won't say a word more."

The duchess was melted to tears. ("Your dear father is always so very good and kind.") But she had it out in her own room with Lena afterwards all the same. "Married at a Registry Office! that is not being married properly at all," she protested.

"It is quite legal," Lena assured her.

"Legal! what is legal?" the little lady solemnly required to be told. "Marriage is a sacrament, a most sacred and holy thing."

"I didn't want to make mine too much so." Having spoken, Lena stopped short to reflect. It was a queer thing to say, she decided, as if somebody else had said it. "What does it mean?"

"And what is to be done now?" the duchess pursued. "Really this is dreadful—so very inconsiderate. No arrangements made, no announcement, no trousseau, no anything."

"Please don't be distressed, Gracious Lady," Lena coaxed. "My things are packed. We shall be off in ten minutes. The wedding journey, at all events, will be all in order, I assure you."

"But you will be here for Ann's marriage, surely?" the duchess exclaimed.

"Impossible," Lena answered, her face hardening. "You

know what I think of the Blond Beast. I will not see that lamb led to sacrifice."

"Sacrifice!" the little lady cried. "How can you talk so improperly? Everybody else is reconciled to—to——"

"To the sacrifice," Lena grimly suggested.

"To parting with Ann. And it isn't parting with her, Pointz is so near——"

"And the Blond Beast can easily dispose of the squire and the rest of the family," Lena got in. "Or perhaps they will all live together for awhile, just to let Ann see what Holy Matrimony is, as understood by the House of Pointz."

"Lena, how *dare* you speak of Holy Matrimony in such a tone!" the little lady scolded. "And you married yourself now! How can you? It is most *improper*."

"How can I know anything about matrimony?" Lena answered coolly. "I've been about a bit, you know, Gracious Lady, and I've eyes in my head."

"Been about a bit! Dear Lena!"—the little lady fluttered her hands in despair. "Where do you get such expressions?"

Lena let that pass, and fired her last shot. "I think I've been very generous," she said.

"Generous!" the duchess protested.

"Well, haven't I left you Ninian?"

"Of necessity," the irate little lady affirmed. "Ninian is not Eustace."

"Not so easily caught, eh? Be careful, Gracious Lady, Eustace is mine now." This hurt, and the duchess winced. "And I'll tell you this about Ninian," Lena prophesied. "He will go further than marrying me would have been, and fare worse." As was her wont, having spoken she paused to reflect upon what she had said, and wondered what it meant. "Oh, dear Gracious Lady," she offered again in mitigation of her offence, not speaking in defiance now, but meaning it, and seeing nothing funny in such a defence; "really it is not so bad as it might have been. I might have taken Ninian, and just think what that would have meant!"

The duchess did think, and admitted to herself that this affair was a blessing in disguise if it had prevented the other possibility.

"And I'm really not so very bad a match for Eustace," Lena pleaded.

"It is not that so much," the duchess admitted, softening. "It might have been quite properly arranged. But to go off like that——"

"That is me, you know," Lena coaxed. "Forgive me, do! You don't want us to be unhappy?"

"Oh no, no!" the good little lady exclaimed. "Heaven forbid!"

"Then that's all right," Lena said, with a sigh of relief. "I must go now and have it out with Paternal Relative. I suppose poor Eustace will have to face his father too; but he will be kind, at all events. He is always kind."

"So very good and kind!" slipped from the duchess unawares. The accustomed formula acted as a sedative, and in the immediate comfort of it, she embraced her daughter-in-law affectionately.

Lena faced her father without attempting to conciliate him. She met him turning into the corridor in which was the duchess's room.

"Well, you've done it now!" he exclaimed with concentrated rage.

"Yes, I've done it," she answered coolly.

"And a pretty mess you've made of it! You might have been a duchess!" he said bitterly.

"Gratitude to your benefactor, the duke, prevented my doing the family such an injury," she rejoined.

"Gratitude!" he blustered. "Where's your gratitude to me?"

She looked at him quizzically.

"If you had even married a man of means!" he blustered on. "But Eustace Brabant!—why, he hasn't a penny to settle on you."

"Does that matter?" she asked smiling. "I am your only child, and presumably your heiress."

"What have I to leave you?" he demanded.

"Oh—as to leaving! Money isn't everything," she reminded him. "There is character, you know. Consider the qualities with which you have endowed me! the training you have given me! the knowledge of the world with which you

have enlarged my mind! Why, those two young men the other night were simply astounded by the specimen you gave them of your original system of education. You won me a husband by that exhibition."

"It would be a better trait in your character, miss, if you showed some respect for—" he was beginning.

"My parent?" she interrupted. "Well, I agree with you. Children ought to respect their parents. I suppose they do when they can, and I can imagine the pleasure of it, too. But when they cannot, how can they?"

"It would be a great deal more promising for your future, you minx, if you set a watch upon that tongue of yours, and assumed a more becoming attitude towards your father," the irate colonel admonished her.

"In public, of course," she agreed; "but in the sanctity of private life, like this, we may open our hearts to each other, surely!"

"You are hopeless," he groaned, "that's a fact."

"Well, we're told to face facts," she reminded him. "My father is a fact, and I have been facing him as a fact for a good while now."

She sighed—disgusted with herself, disgusted with him as the cause of her disgust; hopeless of the whole world.

"You should be grateful to Eustace for relieving you of me," she pursued. "Being, as you say, not a man of means, it would have been natural for him to make a fine career for himself, as is customary among young men of his class, by marrying some nice girl who could keep him comfortably. He never asked me what I could settle upon him. He just gave me all he had——"

"A mere courtesy title," her father sneered.

"Happily it changes my position. I am no longer under your jurisdiction——"

"Oh, damn you!" he burst out, clenching his fists and grinding his teeth.

They were still standing at the end of the corridor where they had encountered each other, and at this moment the duchess came out of her room and fluttered towards them. She was too far off to catch Colonel Kedlock's words, but his voice

was distinctly audible. It was not the custom of the family to settle their differences in loud and angry tones; peace was the prevailing ideal; and the semblance, at least, of peace was habitually preserved among them by courteous manners. Therefore the duchess, when she heard the colonel speaking harshly, hurried up to the pair with questioning eyes.

"All's well, Gracious Lady," Lena assured her, with a smile. "My father has just given me his blessing."

"How right and wise of you!" the duchess exclaimed heartily, addressing Colonel Kedlock. "We were all a little upset at first, weren't we? Lena dear, it *was* naughty! Coming in, too, like that—'Lord and Lady Eustace Brabant'—how could you? But now it is all over. And really quite a happy event," she amiably concluded, letting consistency go that comfort might be restored.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," Lena murmured with a deep sigh.

Colonel Kedlock instantly changed his position. He prided himself upon his adaptability. "Ah, duchess!" he said feelingly, "you must allow for the shock—give me time to recover—my only child!" He took out his pocket-handkerchief and applied it to his eyes, to hide their dryness.

"Oh, dear! This is quite the wrong attitude," the little lady cried, fluttering her hands with a great show of cheerful remonstrance. "Consider that you have gained a son, not lost a daughter."

"Good Gracious, indeed!" Lena inwardly commented; but she was too sick of her father's hypocrisy to show the better side of herself as yet. "You still have Brooks, you know," she said to him significantly. "And I shall always remember the blessing you have given me—so undeserved, considering the kind of daughter I have been to you. If this dear lady only knew—!" Her father began to quake.

"Dear child!" the duchess exclaimed, taking her hand, and looking up at her tenderly, "it is so right of you to acknowledge your faults! But now you have your father's full forgiveness. Begin afresh, dearest. Deserve the blessing he has given you!"

"It will have its effect, you may be sure," Lena answered,

with a hard look at her father. "But please excuse me now. We must not forget that I have a father-in-law, too, whose blessing is worth the winning."

She left them abruptly, to Colonel Kedlock's great relief.

Meantime Eustace, in his father's room, was braving the inevitable interview. As he stood there the expression on his face reminded his father of occasions in his boyhood when he had been brought up before him as a last resort for persisting in some childish misdemeanour. The boy had looked both sheepish and defiant, half sorry and half apologetic, but never ashamed; and now the young man was looking exactly so, especially in the matter of not being ashamed. The duke was amused. The present misdemeanour did not strike him as much more serious than the earlier ones, but now, as then, he felt that he had a duty to perform.

"Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" he began severely.

But Eustace was also reminded of former occasions, and now, as then, detected the suppressed amusement in his father's face, and augured well from it. He had his wits about him, however, and held his tongue.

"Lena!" his father ejaculated in anything but a complimentary tone. "What young men will marry——"

"May I—er—remind you, sir—the lady is now—is my wife," Eustace stammered huffily.

His father, approving of this as quite the right attitude for a gentleman, pulled himself up.

"Of course, my dear boy," he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon."

"Oh, I say—you know—I didn't mean——" Eustace was beginning.

But the duke waved aside further discussion of the necessity for an apology. These amenities had cleared the air, however, and he fell away at once from the position of stern parent, which he had been by way of assuming, and, after fingering his phantom whisker for a little, recommenced in a friendly conversational tone.

"I am not surprised that you should have been attracted, you know," he said. "She really is a most fascinating little person. I am very fond of Lena myself. In fact, I would

rather have had her than any other girl I know for a daughter-in-law if only——”

“Yes, sir?” Eustace said to encourage him, seeing that he hesitated.

“What I mean to say is—well, it’s a delicate matter, you see, now that it’s too late to consider it. But it’s a subject that should be discussed. You’ll have opportunities yourself of putting in a word that may do good—influencing other men in their choice, and all that sort of thing, don’t you know. What you have to think of is the breed.”

“I should have thought the Brabant breed was good enough,” Eustace answered laboriously.

“In one way, yes,” his father agreed without particularising. “Not altogether satisfactory, though. Too many cousins—consanguinity—and all that sort of thing, don’t you know. Then this Kedlock strain—however,” he broke off, “no use discussing that now.”

“Colonel Kedlock has—er—done well by you, sir,” Eustace said.

“He has indeed, yes,” his father answered. “It is by himself that he has not done well. Lena has her good points too—very good points. But she also has—well—she has other points. However, it rests with you now. ‘As the husband is the wife is’—That is poetry though,” he corrected himself. “I confess I’ve not often seen it work out so, in my experience of the prose of life. Still——”

Eustace filled up the pause. “If it rests with me, she will—er—she will—be all right. I shall do my duty by her in so far—er—so far—as I know how.”

“You will, my dear boy,” his father answered heartily. “I know you will. I am only sorry—er—that you made a—that you started in this way. There was no reason why it should not all have been arranged—regularly, you know, and all that sort of thing. However—how about means? What are you going to live on? That’s what you came about, I suppose?”

“No, sir. I came to explain why—that very point—er—to which you have just alluded,” Eustace started with the usual painful effort. “I dislike all irregularity myself. But—er—Colonel Kedlock would never have consented—only have made poor Lena’s position worse—and, er—it was—intolerable. You

don't know what that—er—poor little girl has had to put up with all this time. His conversation—even when he was sober—what he called educating her to dispose of herself to—er—to the best advantage. His drunken orgies—and all she did for him—watching over him—waiting on him hand and foot—up all night often. Got the doctor to teach her how to hypnotise him—er—to put him to sleep. Screened him too—never a word to any of us—not a hint—not a complaint. Did you know?”

“I did not,” the duke stated positively. But he knew, the moment after he had spoken, that he might have known. He remembered the night when Lena said “one-half of the world does not know how the other half lives.” If he had shown sympathy then, she probably would have confided in him. Those “good cries” she spoke of were indication enough that something was wrong. He had been obtuse and he regretted it—poor little girl. “But how do you know? Are you sure? Who told you?” he asked, after a pause for reflection.

Eustace told him exactly how he knew. It was too dangerous a thing to go on in secret. The colonel must be taken care of, if he could not be cured. But for Lena he might at any time have set the Castle on fire and burnt them all in their beds. “If you had seen what I saw, sir, what would you have done—er—about Lena?” Eustace concluded. “Got her out of it—er—as I have—if, er—I know you at all.”

The duke's grim visage relaxed. He held out his hand to his son. (“Good sort, Eustace, nice fellow.”)

It was at this moment that Lena burst in upon them. She took in the situation at a glance, and flung her arms round the duke's neck impulsively, exclaiming, between kisses, imprinted on his face here and there at random: “I knew I should have the best—and dearest—and kindest—father-in-law—in the whole world. I wouldn't have minded being a duchess, even, if I could have been your duchess. Eustace needn't flatter himself. I've only taken him as next best.”

The duke gently extricated himself. “There!” he said, laughing. “Be a good girl. And a good wife. You will have a good husband, and that will be infinitely better for you than a duchy, in every way.”

Looking at her as he spoke, with her mother-of-pearl face

aglow, her dark eyes sparkling, her lithe figure of a slender wood nymph exposed to the best advantage by the elegant simplicity of a travelling dress fresh from Paris, and her fair hair, brightly burnished and perfectly dressed, set off by a most becoming velvet toque, he acknowledged to himself that she would have done well for a duchess so far as her appearance went, and allowed that Eustace had excuses enough to justify his departure from precedent.

"I shall miss you," he said with a sigh. "And how about Her Repose?"

"I shall be glad if you will miss me a little," she answered. "But we're not going to the uttermost ends of the earth, you know. Eustace says he must exchange into a cheaper regiment. He's going to try for the *Depôt* at Closeminster."

"On Ann's account," Eustace explained, "er—partly. Also Paul MacAllen Ray will be there."

"Ah, your old Eton chum," the duke answered. "Tell him to look us up. Nice fellow—pietistic, perhaps, but—er—so is his uncle—Imlac, Lord Imlac, you know"—this to Lena, who did not know. "They all are, er, devout. No harm in that, though. Been abroad—India—hasn't he?"

"Five years," Eustace answered. "He's home now for a spell at the—er—the *Depôt*."

So the conversation trickled off into ordinary channels as on any other day, and it was with a start that they suddenly recollected that there was anything special toward, and hurried away to make the final preparation for their departure.

There was quite a little crowd to see them off. The whole household had turned out voluntarily, and all the retainers about the place, to whom the news had flown in the mysterious way such news does fly. Many of the villagers, too, had thrown down their tools and swarmed up the Castle hill to the entrance, where an omnibus laden with luggage and a close carriage awaited the popular young pair. Lena's French maid was surrounded by eager questioners, whom she baffled by conveniently forgetting the English for everything they wanted to know. She was a sober, staid-looking young person—*sérieuse* obviously—the last sort of thing, everybody said, whom Lena might have been expected to have about her, she being generally credited with "smart" predilections, principally because she herself was

so smart with her tongue; also, perhaps, because "everybody's" powers of observation are notoriously defective. Had it been otherwise in her case, it must have been evident by this time that the one thing which could be expected of her with any certainty was the unexpected.

"Dear me!" said the duchess, stopping short in surprise as she came out on to the steps, and putting up her lorgnette to survey the little crowd. "Dear me! It looks like a wedding."

Everybody within hearing laughed, and all the more gladly because laughing matter was scarce at the moment. The little lady did not understand why they laughed until Colonel Kedlock grimly explained to her that this was supposed to be a wedding. This brought to mind her doubt of the validity of the marriage because there had been no religious ceremony, and she was on the point of putting an emphatic stop to the proceedings until a clergyman could be fetched and the ceremony properly performed. Fortunately her attention was diverted by the reception the young pair received as soon as they appeared. Amidst hearty cheers they ran down the steps, and went round together, shaking hands with everybody. Some of the women, made emotional by the excitement of the occasion, kissed the bride, and there was a loud chorus of congratulations.

"Really, quite touching!" said the duchess, dabbing her eyes with an inadequate scrap of lace and gossamer.

Colonel Kedlock folded his arms and scowled. He had come out to see his daughter off in honour of the proprieties partly, but also that the duchess might not be undeceived as to the nature of the blessing which, in his heart he continued silently to reiterate.

On the kindly commonplace face of the duke, as he stood there, nervously fingering his phantom whiskers, the shade of melancholy always perceptible in moments of preoccupation, visibly deepened.

"Eustace is a dear good fellow," were his last whispered words to Lena.

"Yes," she said, "that is just what I want. Eustace will always be my friend, whatever happens."

"Lena," the duke said solemnly, and there was warning as well as entreaty in his tone. "You will be good."

"I am good," she gently insisted; but to herself she said as she turned away, "The same old story—oh dear! Why are they always in doubt of my goodness? How can I be what everybody suggests that I am not?"

This brought her to her father in a state of defiance. They looked into each other's faces, hostile at first, but the next moment each was overcome with emotion. They were father and daughter, after all; the tie of blood in their case had been strengthened by close association; neither had ever doubted the other's affection. Alone together in the close intimacy of their near relationship, they had been in fact and by habit all in all to each other, and now, on a sudden, when the time to part had come, overwhelmed by a flood of recollection and anticipation, recollection of past good times together and anticipation of the days to come when each must miss the other in innumerable ways, they both realised that the breaking of such a bond, even under the most satisfactory circumstances, must result in loss and pain.

"You will—you will take care of yourself, Paternal Relative," Lena said with a break in her voice. She laid her hands on his shoulders. "I've told Brooks about your things—for to-night. I cut the leaves"—her eyes filled with tears—"of your new books——"

She could say no more, and her father also was overcome. He muttered something in which she distinguished the words "Little girl," "only child," "happiness," "my one thought"; kissed her, shook hands with Eustace, and hurried in.

"My! the colonel does feel it! We're getting our money's worth," was the valet's comment to the French maid.

"Shut up," she said, a startling reply from one who five minutes before had been unacquainted with the English language.

Lena took leave of the duchess last of all. She stood before the little lady with clasped hands and eyes blurred with tears. "You have always been a mother to me," she said; "the only mother I ever had; my mother more than ever now."

"Yes, dear, yes," the little lady responded, much affected. "Really and truly and for always your mother now—my poor dear child."

"For all your goodness to me," Lena said, deeply moved,

"and for all your patience with me, may heaven reward you. And may I be forgiven for, as surely as I repent of, all the trouble I have given you."

"My poor dear Lena! Only naughty, you know." The little lady comforted her with a kiss on each cheek. "And now you are married, you know, you cannot be naughty. Married ladies have to be grown up—dignified. And poor dear Eustace—for his sake!"

She looked up at Eustace with a watery smile, a poor attempt, but she made a determined effort to control her feelings "before all these people," and succeeded so far as to be able to stand in front of the group on the top of the steps and wave her farewell with the inadequate morsel of gossamer and lace, now sopped with tears, to the carriage as it drove away. But almost before the last lingering echoes, thrown back by the old grey walls of the Castle, from turret and tower, of the hearty cheers sent up to speed the bride and bridegroom forth, had died away, she recovered herself, and was foretelling a happy future for the pair. Melton helped her. "Well, mother, for an impromptu wedding," he said, "I don't think the establishment has done so badly."

"No, has it?" she answered, brightening. "Really quite touching, you know. Very inconsiderate of Lena, of course"—she never thought of blaming Eustace—"but we all know what Lena is. However, she has a truly good heart with all her faults. Ah, my dearest Ann, a good heart! What a long way that goes! It is everything, I am sure." After a moment's pause she revised this pronouncement. "Of course you must have other things as well—but if you belong to the same set, have plenty of money to keep up your social position, similarity of tastes, control of your temper, practise your religion, and are careful not to be extravagant in thought or word or deed, then, with a good heart, you are sure to be happy. Lena is extravagant, I am afraid—or was—in words, at least. She does say the most reckless things; but let us hope that marriage will cure her of all that. Marriage has the most steadying effect. Indeed, it effects the most wonderful changes"—this was thrown out by way of encouragement to herself and Ann and enlightenment to Ninian with regard to Algernon Pointz—"and after all—well! As your dear father

says, the thing is done now, so let it be done with. Your dear father is always right."

The duke proposed to be generous to the young pair, but the duchess would not hear of it—at present. Somehow it would have felt like money going out of the family, a possibility she could never contemplate even with her habitual outward equanimity; it always upset her. In most cases she found a good reason to prevent it, and in this instance her ingenuity was not at fault. "Discipline is so good for young people, dearest," she argued. "Let them be poor to begin with. Poverty does so strengthen the character."

She spoke as with the confidence of one who has experienced the discipline in question, and profited by it. The folly of imposing on others against their will a form of self-discipline which we practise ourselves from choice, never dawned upon her. The duke may have known better intuitively, but he said nothing. Long experience had taught him never to oppose his wife in argument. He had acquired an ambiguous way of shaking his head when they disagreed, which answered two purposes. It satisfied her that she had gained her point, and at the same time committed him to nothing. In this way he left himself honourably free to act as he chose without further parley.

There may also have been some vindictiveness in the good little lady's earnest desire to discipline Lena with the constraint of restricted means, not on account of Lena's marriage, she was reconciled to that, but because of her obstinate and outspoken objection to Algernon as a husband for Ann. She maintained that with regard to Algernon it was simply Lena's unreasonable dislike that made her ill-natured, that she knew nothing really discreditable about him. In this last supposition she was mistaken, but even if she had not been, it would not have proved that Lena's was merely an ill-natured prejudice. A young girl like Lena, if she is not in love with him, will intuitively take the measure of a scoundrel as accurately for practical purposes as any man of the world informed by knowledge. In the little duchess's mind, however, there was only room for one consideration at a time to rule paramount, and all her present care was for Algernon's soul. Any opposition to the means by which she believed it could be saved alive only

irritated her. Having forgiven him his trespasses herself, she believed them to be blotted out, and that nothing was wanting now but the influence of a good woman to keep him in the right way for ever. She saw nothing in Lena's attitude but wicked perversity, and wicked perversity deserved to be punished. In her religion punishment played an important part, and consistency no part at all. She was therefore quite capable of having Lena punished, while at the same time advocating the tenderer means of reform for Algernon.

It was strange that her own intuition should have failed her in so serious a matter, but it did until it was too late. Just at the last, however, after the wedding, when the terrible time of parting was close at hand, she was suddenly stricken with fear and foreboding. Mrs. Pointz, with her usual tactlessness, had wondered significantly why Lena and Eustace had not made it convenient to be present on so important an occasion, and in the effort to find a plausible reason for their absence the duchess had been forcibly reminded of the real one. Then, too, the squire had not come. He had pleaded "indisposition" at the last moment as an excuse, a word of ominous import. Why was he indisposed to sanction the marriage with his presence? The question would present itself—so silly, when of course he meant that he was ill. This she chose to think, but close behind the word she forced herself to articulate in her mind, insistent, impressive, was that ominous "indisposed." Suppose—no, she would not suppose.

But she had to suppose at the last, when there was nothing between Ann and heaven only knew what fate but her own poor weak mother's arms, from which, in another moment, Ann must be torn by the exigencies of the monstrous circumstance which the mother herself had encouraged and allowed. Suppose this man, to whose absolute keeping the girl must now pass, suppose he was not—suppose he was, as Lena insisted, a beast——

"Oh, my darling little Ann," the poor mother cried, holding her tight in an agony of apprehension and doubt. "My little girl! the last of my babies—I can't let you go!"

It was a painful scene, and it had to be put an end to. The duke interfered.

"My dear," he said at last, imperatively, "you must control

yourself. Ann, your husband is waiting. Here, Algernon, take her."

And Algernon had lifted her into the carriage, a bride by capture, as it seemed to some of the onlookers, another ominous suggestion.

As they drove off, Algernon threw himself back in the carriage, and exclaimed: "Thank goodness that damned business is over!"

"*Algernon!*" Ann ejaculated.

"What is the matter?" he asked politely. He knew quite well what was the matter. "Marital language, eh? Now *that* you are married, my dear, you'll have to get used to marital language." He chuckled. He had always promised himself that, when he married, he should begin as he meant to go on and he flattered himself that this was a good beginning.

The shock of it dried Ann's tears.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was spring again, the spring which completed the third year of Adnam's enterprise. The early dinner was over at Pratt's Place, but the party had not yet left the table. It consisted of five people, the family and Mickleham, known to them now as Uncle Aubon Strelletzen. He was leaving England for some vague destination which was understood to be Mexico or the Argentine, and, after a lengthy absence, had returned to say good-bye. Old Emery had detained them just as they were about to move, by mentioning an interesting item of news. The conversation had lapsed, as it usually does when every one feels that it is time to rise, but there was a resettling and a revival of attention when he spoke.

"I forgot," he began, "I have an important piece of gossip for you." They all looked at him with animation. "Eh! that brings you to life, does it? Don't let's flatter ourselves we're any of us above listening to gossip, eh?"

"When we hear what the gossip is, we shall know whether we are superior to it or not," Ursula said, smiling.

"If you would know your neighbours, you must listen to gossip," Uncle Aubon maintained. "Men and women show the quality of their minds plainly in the news they think worth retailing."

"Also in their manner of retailing it," Ursula added.

"And their object," the prince pursued. "There is idle and ill-natured gossip, and there is the gossip which comes of a healthy-minded interest in the joys and sorrows of our neighbours."

"I am relieved," said old Emery. "I was afraid that, between the pair of you, I should be made ashamed to speak. But this piece of gossip won't lower me in your estimation, I hope. At least, it should come into the category of joys. If it doesn't, the fault is in my neighbours to whom it relates, for the thing itself should be matter for rejoicing." He paused to enjoy their impatience.

"Well?" Mrs. Pratt said at last.

"Get on, Emery, eh? You are so slow!" he interpreted the query. "Well, I was told by the good rector himself that Miss Beryl Blatchford is engaged to be married to Lieutenant Paul MacAllen Ray, of her Majesty's Shire Light Infantry, now quartered at Closeminster."

Ray was an old schoolfellow and friend of Eustace Brabant's. Adnam had made his acquaintance at the Perrys', and had brought him to Pratt's Place, where, partly owing to his strong religious bent and sympathy with Mrs. Pratt's views, he had soon become intimate. He was a nephew of Lord Imlac's, on which account, principally, Beryl Blatchford, overlooking his piety, which perplexed her, had accepted him.

"I expected it," Ursula said, with her eyes on glimpses she had had of the two together.

"Did you, now?" said old Emery. "Well, I did not. For the young man has haunted this house since he came into the neighbourhood, and I thought he was too much in love with my Lady to look at any Beryl Blatchford."

"Don't be ridiculous, Emery," his lady answered tranquilly.

He beamed at her, and then remarked: "It looks as if Closeminster was going to be colonised by young women from Castlefield Saye—three of them gone there already, or as good as gone."

"And all three so different," Ursula remarked. "It would be interesting to know what the future has in store for them."

"It would be fairly easy to predict with regard to two of them," the prince rejoined; "but the third——" He toyed with a wineglass.

Ursula, without looking at Adnam, knew that he had changed countenance. The news of Lena Kedlock's marriage had been sprung upon him suddenly in her presence, and, before he could control himself, she had seen that it was a shock to him. The conversation was trending in that direction now, and she tried to divert it without abruptly changing the subject.

"Beryl Blatchford is not very clear to me," she said. "Where do you place her?"

"As an item in the aggregate of her class," Uncle Aubon answered; "a molecule whose activities are directed solely towards securing for herself every vulgar material advantage she can lay hold of, while at the same time preventing the invasion of her privileges by other molecules."

"That's rather rough on Beryl, isn't it, sir?" Seraph asked with his little tee-hee laugh that always irritated his father.

"I state the fact," the prince replied. "It is not of my ordering. It has been well said that in nature there are no rewards or punishments, there are consequences; and the same is obviously true of human nature. But without the whole plan of life before us and a knowledge of the amount of responsibility allowed to each individual, who shall distinguish between what is 'rough on us,' as you graphically call it, and what is merely our deserts? When I say that Miss Beryl's activities are directed towards securing for herself *et cetera*, I do not say that she is the sole directrice. It may have taken the activities of a thousand other human molecules to determine what hers shall be."

"That is predestination, surely," old Emery interposed.

"In a sense, yes; but not the predestination of the fatalist, ordered by a Supreme Being against whose decrees there is no appeal. It is the predestination which men are making every day for each other and for their own descendants; the predestination which, because it is the outcome of their own acts, they certainly have it in their power to control. If men would but realise how far-reaching the effects of their habits are, habits of

mind as well as habits of life, those at least who are public spirited, in the best sense we attach to that term at present, would certainly see that the responsibility of making provision for the future of the race begins earlier and extends further than they are wont to suppose. Humanity is an organic whole which must suffer in its entirety whilst any of its component parts are degraded. In all things, social and physical, there is law; also there is retributive justice. Progress does not mean the accumulation of capital; it means the prosperity of the community. And the prosperity of the community can only be assured by the efforts of individuals to live uprightly, do their duty conscientiously in their own sphere of action, and extend a disinterested helping hand to their neighbours, both in their intimate relations and in the promotion of such social changes as shall make for a higher standard of life all round. If material progress does not rest on a good sound basis of moral probity, it makes for disaster. Take, for example, the influence of wealth. What is the possession of wealth resulting in everywhere about us when it is in the hands of people without moral principle and without any altruistic sense of duty towards their fellow creatures at large? It is resulting in those forms of enervating and degrading self-indulgence which make most surely for the present misery and the future deterioration of the whole human race."

"Ay, you're right," old Emery affirmed. "But what's to be done?"

"Educate," said the prince. "Take for guide the Positivist maxim: 'All social remedies must be moral, not material,' and educate all classes on that principle. You have it in the Christian code; bring it into the sphere of practical politics also. The moral and intellectual growth of individuals helps, but it will be unavailing so long as the question how best to promote the moral and intellectual growth of whole nations is not the first consideration of parents, pastors, masters, and all rulers and governors."

"It's a big subject," said Emery Pratt. "I'd like to have my time over again, and begin at the beginning."

"With Miss Beryl Blatchford then, we may suppose, since she was the beginning of it," Seraph remarked, with the usual facetious little tee-hee; "might we not also consider Lady

Ann's future profitably from the sociological point of view? What do you consider her prospects are, sir?"

"Lady Ann—ah!" the prince answered, ignoring his flippancy. "She has been given over to the enemy defenceless."

"Cryptic," Seraph observed in an undertone.

But the prince's hearing was acute. "What do you call it, Adnam?" he asked.

"Terse," Adnam answered laconically.

"Let's finish the trio," Seraph suggested. "There's Miss Lena Kedlock——"

"She'll be all right," his father interrupted, comfortably. "A bit wild, but the best of hearts. That sort does well."

"Humph," said Strelletzen.

Mrs. Pratt glanced at Adnam. He was toying with his coffee cup, and his face was impassive, but there was no disguising from his mother the strong feeling that was working within, only she could not be sure of the nature of the feeling. Becoming aware of her scrutiny, he spoke—to put her off the scent, perhaps.

"We were speaking as if there were only three girls in the neighbourhood—how about Miss Godiva Pointz?" he said.

"Born to be the helpmate of an ambitious man with his own interests always uppermost in his mind, and no fine feelings to stand in his way if the means to advance them are not benevolent," Strelletzen answered thoughtfully.

"You seem to have studied the young ladies in our neighbourhood, sir," Seraph put in, flicking at a fly with his napkin to prove that he was at his ease.

"I know them all well," the prince replied.

"Then how about Ella Banks?" Seraph asked.

His father took it upon himself to reply.

"A marble statue," he said. "Give me good wholesome flesh and blood with a few faults to vouch for its being human."

"I should think she comes to life sometimes," said the prince.

"Yes, and can be animated enough," Mrs. Pratt assured him.

"In my day, in all the books, when a girl married that was the end of her story," old Emery observed. "You are talking now as if the story only began at the altar."

"That's only the end of the first volume," his lady answered. "We've been trying to make out something of the contents of the second."

"Speirling into the future, that's waste of time," old Emery decided.

"I don't know," said the prince. "If the lives of mankind could be mapped out as the heavens are, if we could judge the relation of one life to another as we can judge that of the stars, doubtless what is coming into the life of a human being could be foretold, mathematically calculated, as the course of a star is calculated. Even the coming and going of a human comet might be calculated if all the influences that bear upon the production of human comets were before us. It was some glimmering of this possibility, perhaps, which confused men's minds and diverted their attention from the study of mankind by flattering them into the belief that their little destinies were ruled by the stars."

"Then you don't believe in astrology?" old Emery said.

"Not as generally practised," he answered. "But I believe in Illumination, and Illumination comes so unexpectedly, and from such very different quarters, that it is hard to assign any limit to the causes which induce it. We have but one certainty with regard to the phenomena of Illumination: concentration must precede it—that absorption or suspension of our ordinary faculties which renders us insensible to whatever is within range of eye and mind, and sets us free to make use of a further faculty with a range of vision to which no limit is set, either in time or space. This state may be involuntary; when it is, the Seer may depend upon the truth of what he sees or foresees. But unfortunately it may also be artificially induced and then, although genuine Illumination does sometimes result, no reliance can be placed upon it until after the event. Hence the mischief—fraud, imposture, and all that."

"You're talking Chinese to me," old Emery said, with his good gigantic laugh.

Strelletzen took out his watch. "I've been talking too much, at any rate," he said. "I want to have a look at Adnam's Orchard before I go, and I'm due at the Castle in half an hour. The Castle must wait."

He glanced round the hall, a farewell glance, as he left

the table. The deep, quiet colour, the homely comfort of it, appealed to him; the atmosphere of order and refinement impressed him. The unostentatious goodness of every appointment, the subdued but perfect harmony of tint and tone, spoke less of wealth than of that long continuance in ease and affluence which, when it is accompanied by intellectual cultivation and growth, makes always for beauty. The cloth had been withdrawn for dessert, and the service shone, picturesquely reflected in the polished surface of the table, a fortuitous composition, but perfect for a study of still life—to which even the slight disorder of the things that had been used added something of interest. Strelletzen contrasted this home of physical fitness, of health of mind and spiritual awakenings, and of high integrity, where all was ordered by the sense of duty, with the life lived in so many other houses, in which also there was much that was admirable in conduct, though only sporadic—not to be calculated upon. Here principle was the dominant factor; in those other houses the law of action was for the most part determined by inclination, the thing done being less often the thing that should be done than the thing which it was pleasant to do,—or profitable from the anti-social point of view of vulgar self-interest.

They were all preparing to accompany the prince but Seraph, who seemed to be hesitating. Seeing this, his step-mother urged him: "Come with us, Seraph, do!"

"Yes, come along, my son," old Emery said as he put on his hat.

Seraph concealed his disinclination by affecting to have intended to go all along. He had been in two minds, as a matter of fact. His jealousy of Adnam made it hateful to him to be witness of his success, but, on the other hand, he dearly loved to be in the company of a prince, especially when he could show himself with him to his little world, in full enjoyment of all the inestimable small privileges which are the right of friendly kinship. Because Strelletzen was Adnam's uncle, Seraph chose to think of him contemptuously as "only a foreign prince, and an insignificant-looking, faddy little chap at that." All the same, he fully understood the advantage of the connexion. He had been made to appreciate it at Pointz by the immediate improvement he found that it had made

in his own status, even in the estimation of the squire. He stood apart from his family in this as in other things, being the only one of them to whom the prince was more than a man.

Mrs. Pratt considered that Seraph had been much improved by his experiences at Pointz. Certainly he had there learnt to estimate her value as a stepmother. "We have always been ready to receive your stepmother as one of ourselves," Mrs. Pointz used to tell him condescendingly at first. "The dear duchess wished it." But after the advent of "The Prince" she altered the formula. "What a pity it is," she lamented, "that your dear stepmother continues to live in such seclusion. Her delicate health doubtless renders it necessary; but for one so eminently fitted to move in the best society, it must be a great deprivation to her to have to forego it. Please tell her that I am ready at any time to go and sit with her, not to tire her, you know, but just to vary the monotony."

Godiva, too, admired his stepmother, and praised her taste in unqualified terms. She supposed Mrs. Pratt helped Adnam to choose his things, he was always so very well dressed. Seraph was quick enough where his own interests were concerned, and the hint was not lost upon him. From that time forward he consulted his stepmother about his own dress, with marked advantage. He had always held aloof from her hitherto, but now he began to hover about her, and paid her many little attentions. She had tried to be invariably gentle and considerate to him, and could meet his advances now without making any change in her manner. It had always been kind and friendly. His object in cultivating her acquaintance was to catch the "tone" so often mentioned at Pointz, which distinguished Adnam.

"How would you define charm?" he asked her one day. "In what does charm consist?"

"In communicativeness with discretion," she answered, "to a large extent. In a certain expansiveness which makes you feel in the confidence of the person with whom you are speaking. Confidential talk is always pleasant, and there is nothing more exhilarating than an expansive mood when you feel it safe to expand. That is where discretion comes in as a part of

charm; if you find it in what is said of other people, you feel that it will be exercised with regard to your own confidences. Discretion vouches for itself."

"Being your stepson has made things easy for me at Pointz," he confided to her. "If I hadn't been so well drilled at home, I couldn't have held my own amongst them."

"Well drilled—how do you mean?" she asked.

"Oh, in manners and all that sort of thing," he answered. "You've always been so particular, you know. Finger-bowls every day—tee-hee!"

She smiled. "But any other stepmother would have been just as particular," she said in defence of stepmothers.

"Any other stepmother wouldn't have known," he replied.

Ursula was simple-minded enough to mark up a point in his favour. She thought he was showing gratitude, an admirable trait; but he was merely congratulating himself on what he had scored with her help.

The year was at the junction of winter and spring. There had been a hard frost the night before, and the crispness, tempered by spring sunshine, still lingered in the air that afternoon, an exhilarating mixture. Intensive cultivation does not make a pretty picture. Adnam's Orchard was bathed in sunshine, but that, it must be confessed, was its only beauty—in the eyes, at least, of those who did not appraise its worth from the utilitarian point of view. He had divided it into four principal sections by means of cross-roads which met round the fountain in the middle, like the arms of a Maltese cross. The whole was framed by a broad road which ran right round it, and each section was subdivided for convenience by narrow paths. Every inch that could be utilised was under cultivation. There were patches of brown earth either sowed or waiting ready prepared for the crops to be planted out, but the first glance gave a general effect of glass, glass everywhere, glass houses, glass frames, glass bells, the latter looking like a mushroom growth upspringing on broad beds with strange regularity. Bright rays and stars, dazzling to the eye, shot back all the colours of the rainbow from the glass to the sun, where it struck on a knob or a projecting angle. Under the glass, through a veil of mist, it was possible to see, by peering, that there was greenery. Acres of vegetables, not

yet in season, stood there, warmly protected, and either ready or very soon to be ready for cutting.

"My word, Adnam," his father exclaimed, after inspecting the houses and peeping under hot-bed lids and bell glasses innumerable, "you'll have to find purchasers pretty quick, or half your crop will be spoilt for want of cutting."

"It's all sold," Adnam answered. "Cutting's to begin immediately."

"And who's to do the carting?" his father asked.

"The purchasers," was the reply.

Old Emery thumped his stick on the ground and laughed. He could never get over the wonder of Adnam's precocity. It was to him as if a babe were giving itself the grown-up airs of a 'cute man of business.

His uncle had been looking at the sky. "The sooner the better," he said. "And until you get rid of your stuff, look well to your frames and your fires. There's no trusting your climate for twelve hours together at this time of the year."

"You're right," old Emery followed on. "I've known it snow on Derby Day. I mistrust these late frosts." Then turning to Adnam, he said: "This is your fourth spring in the Orchard, isn't it, my son? I think you promised us fine profits by then."

Adnam surveyed his glass and smiled.

"From four to six hundred pounds an acre is not unusual," his uncle remarked.

"My word!" slipped from Seraph.

But the information seemed to have surprised him more than it pleased him. There were taps for watering placed at every convenient angle. One would have thought he had a grudge against them by the way he looked at them and struck at them with his stick as the party passed along.

Work was in full swing at that hour, and Strelletzen went from man to man, taking a friendly leave of each. Those who had known him as Mickleham, of whom only a few were left, stared at him respectfully; but since they knew him as a prince he interested them much less than he had done while he was still a mystery. A curiosity is of small account compared to a mystery, and it was as a curiosity that they regarded him

now—a thing not to be seen every day and therefore to be looked at when it did appear; a thing of no moment to them because detached from their lives, but of the same sort of interest as any unusual object which they might come across in a museum, set up and labelled. They acknowledged amongst themselves that they knew nothing against him, had no complaint to make of him; but suspicion lurked behind the acknowledgment. They recalled the feeling they had had about him, “a queer feeling.” If he had proved to be something extraordinary, a political refugee with a price on his head, or a prophet with an uncanny reputation for the possession of occult power, they would have been satisfied and ready to speak a word in his favour; but just an ordinary foreign prince—! Why had he come amongst them at all in disguise like that? To recover his digestion after being crossed in love, the melancholy man opined; but Corporal Locke, with the military system strong upon him, set him down as an informer, spying amongst the men; and this suggestion, though never formally accepted, was not rejected. The man, by the impression he had made upon them, had won for himself the benefit of a doubt; but the prince remained under suspicion.

The little party had now come to the end of the Orchard, where the men's huts stood. Corrugated iron does not readily lend itself to decorative effect, but a not unsuccessful effort had been made to beautify the spot. The ground about had been converted into a flower garden, with grass borders to the beds and gravelled walks; and the ugliness of the huts themselves was masked with lattice work, covered in due season with the flowers and foliage of a variety of creeping plants.

“A whole good acre wasted here,” was Seraph's carping comment, facetiously delivered.

“Oh, Seraph, I don't agree with you,” his stepmother exclaimed. “Surely nothing that brings decency and comfort, not to mention beauty, into the lives of toiling men, can be called wasted!”

“What do toiling men care for rambler roses and purple clematis?” Seraph asked.

“The proof that they care is that they have done all this for themselves,” Adnam answered dispassionately.

“At your expense, I suppose.”

"Not at all. Not even at my expense in the matter of time. They give their own free time to it."

"Was it your idea?" his father asked.

"No, I am sorry to say," Adnam answered. "I should never have thought of it. The ground had been trampled about the tents, and the men asked me if they might put it tidy when the huts were run up; that is all I know about it." He turned to his uncle with a smile: "I fancy you know a great deal more," he said.

His uncle answered with a smile.

"I never heard you object to our cottage gardens, Seraph," Mrs. Pratt remarked.

"Oh, well, you know, they're different," Seraph answered, hunching his shoulders. "Their ground is no good, but here every inch might be turned to account. The cottagers have always had a flower or two amongst their cabbages. There can be no objection to that."

"But they must stop there, that's enough for them, eh?" Strelletzen suggested. "Hard crusted conservatism! Beauty for the classes, use for the masses, but allowance made for 'a flower or two,' provided the cabbages are there to guarantee that the wasteful innovation will go no further."

"You are all for the masses, I'm afraid, sir," Seraph rejoined with his tee-hee laugh.

"I am all for justice, I hope," was the earnest reply.

"I hope I'm for justice, too," Seraph answered, in the tone of a man who is resenting an implied reproach; "but not when justice stands for Socialism, a euphemism much in use nowadays."

"Socialism is made to answer for a multitude of sins," the prince replied. "One must ask for a definition always to make sure of what is meant when the word is brought in. If by Socialist you mean a man who hopes to see a fairer distribution of wealth so that each man may have enough for the needs of his station, enough to live on in decency and comfort in return for his work, with leisure enough for the enjoyment of life, but never too much, never enough, that is to say, to keep him in idleness and enervating luxury, then I am a Socialist."

They had come to the Mess House now. It stood in the

centre of the row of huts, a long low building, with a pediment in which was a clock, and a roofed veranda below. Round the wooden supports of the veranda rambler roses were trained in profusion up to and over the roof. They promised a feast of beauty by and by, but just now their too precocious foliage, which, deluded by the false promise of the early spring days, had ventured to burst into leaf under the impression that the warmth had come to stay, hung discoloured and sad; and the first down-drooping leaves which the hoary chestnuts, no wiser for all their age and solidity than the poor frail roses, had hastened to display—shrivelled and browned by the nipping frost, tended also to produce a melancholy impression of failure and blight, from which a lesson on the uncertainties of life might have been deduced with depressing effect.

The little party had come to the Mess House to see the Recreation Room, a large room with boarded sides and floor and ceiling, simple in its appointments, but furnished by Mrs. Pratt from the overflow at Pratt's Place, with everything necessary for comfort—tables, chairs, bookshelves, curtains, pictures, writing materials, and a serviceable upright piano, much appreciated by the men in their hours of ease.

"I suppose these books didn't cost you anything," Seraph observed, concealing the sarcasm as usual under an affectation of *bonhomie*.

"I got them cheap from a man in Closeminster who keeps a secondhand bookshop, a friend of mine," Adnam answered, glancing at them indifferently.

"You've got a fine variety," his father observed, after reading the titles.

"I had a fine variety of minds to cater for," Adnam replied.

"I'll bet they're not grateful, not one of them," Seraph declared.

"Why should they be grateful, this is not a charity," Adnam rejoined. "They are doing the work of men and have a right to be treated like men, not like cattle. All the gratitude you expect from your horse for his oats is the work you get out of him."

"Ay, you're right there, my son," Old Emery agreed. "You must give men a chance to live the lives of men if you want them to be men and not brutes. And what is the life of a man?

What is it that makes the difference between a man and a brute? Just ask yourself!"

"Besides, they *are* grateful," Mrs. Pratt insisted. "They appreciate their comforts, surely that is gratitude enough."

"It's the sentimentality I can't stand," Seraph said lamely.

"I like a little dash of sentimentality, myself," old Emery declared. "The flavour is pleasant; it's a sweetener. Without sentimentality the cup of life would be too bitter for most of us to drain to the dregs. I should perhaps say sentiment rather than sentimentality," he added, correcting himself upon reflection.

"Quite so," Strelletzen agreed with a nod. "Sentiment is good strong feeling in its purity, sentimentality is the sickly, spurious imitation. There's a lot of sickly sentimentality in England; your hidebound conservatism reeks of it."

"Well, I'm a Conservative, and I'm proud of it," Seraph declared emphatically.

"A Progressive Conservative has no need to be otherwise," the prince answered quietly.

"I don't know about Progressive—" Seraph was beginning suspiciously; the word had radical associations of ill-omen from his point of view.

"I saw you smile the other day at the mention of the old rotation and three-field system of your ancestors," the prince reminded him. "One crop a year, or four in every three years, was 'good enough' for your fathers but it is not 'good enough' for you. You are studying hard how to get six or nine crops from one plot of land in the twelve months. Is not that progress?"

"He's got you there, Seraph!" Old Emery exclaimed, with his good gigantic laugh.

"Oh—that," said Seraph, disconcerted. "I was thinking of all this grandmotherly rot and cosseting that is going on now. What's the result of it? Discontent and strikes! Keep the high hand of the people, *I* say, and of the subject nations. If they don't behave themselves, shoot!"

"The British Tory stands gallantly to his guns; it is a pity he hasn't the pluck to face the times and adapt himself," the prince observed. "The problems that modern men and women have to face are not to be solved with powder and shot. The modern spirit cannot be shot down, but your fine old Tory

refuses to believe it. He was brought up on the classics, but makes no use of them except to brag of the fact. His brains are cobwebbed with prejudice, and he must go; but let him commit his own Happy Despatch. Encourage him! His conservatism is the malady that makes for progress by resulting in social stagnation, a dangerous state from which plagues arise, urging, with threats of destruction, the imperative necessity for reform."

Old Emery stood, large and laconic, reflecting upon this, with sundry nods of his head and compression of his lips. "Well," he said at last, "I've always called myself a Conservative, but I confess I don't quite know what I mean by it. Party politics don't attract me; they are far from clean on either side, far from disinterested."

"Oh, as to disinterested," Strelletzen exclaimed, "mankind impresses the world with fine expressions of disinterestedness, but in the practical details of life it is self-interest that predominates in all parties, Aristocrat, Democrat, Socialist, and Labour. 'Sociocracy' alone is bound, as well as pledged, to rule in the interests of the whole. I am a 'Sociocrat.' If I am guilty of self-interest I break my covenant with my party and am automatically cast out. My own act is judge, jury, and witness against me; therefore, so long as I stand a 'Sociocrat,' you will know what to expect of me. To that extent you may trust the 'Sociocrat' above all other professors of principles."

Seraph took up a newspaper and sat down on the piano stool. He was of those who preserve their original prejudices intact by the simple expedient of refusing to consider anything that might upset them.

"I am afraid," said old Emery, "that 'Thinking Imperially' has come to mean thinking in armaments to the majority——"

"Who never think," Strelletzen concluded for him, with a twinkle at his own paradox. "The financier pulls the strings for his own profit, and the Jingo Puppets dance."

Mrs. Pratt, who was sitting at the window looking up at the sky, suddenly startled them here with an exclamation: "What was that?" she cried.

"What?" they demanded in concert, following the direction of her eyes.

"Something white floated past the window."

"The Angel of Peace," Seraph suggested, with his little tee-hee.

Adnam went to the window in his deliberate way, with his hands in his pockets, and looked out. "I see nothing," he said. "It was a pigeon, perhaps, or a sea-gull."

"No, much smaller," she rejoined.

"A feather then."

"The White Feather of the Peace Party," slipped from Seraph before he could save himself.

The prince bowed an ironical acknowledgment of the compliment implied.

"It looked like a flake of snow," Mrs. Pratt said in a tone that made the words ominous.

"But why should that alarm my lady?" old Emery asked, with a reassuring smile.

She shivered. "I don't know," she said. "I am alarmed. I think—because I am alarmed."

Her husband looked at her with an anxious puckering of his forehead; he was always fearful of any shock to her, she was so fragile. Her brother also looked at her, a keenly inquiring look; he knew her for a sensitive, and suspected a flash of lucidity. The glances of husband and brother were momentary, and satisfied neither of them; but in view of her agitation they decided with one accord to change the subject as the best thing to soothe and divert her.

"You were saying—?" old Emery began to give the prince a lead.

"I was going to say to Adnam, as a parting avuncular valediction—*vi-el!*" he broke off, laughing—"what a concatenation! But what I want to say is that I am going away with a weight off my mind. I have found a nephew and—" he was going to say heir, but changed his mind and repeated—"a nephew after my own heart. You and I, Adnam, are the last men left of our old and honourable race——"

"We need not be," Adnam interrupted in all seriousness. "We can both marry, you know."

Seraph, the worldly wise, sniggered at him for an ass. The elders smiled. They understood the disinterested generosity of youth.

"One of us will marry happily, I hope," his uncle answered.

"That is a matter in which I should like to have my say by and by, if you will do me the honour to consult me. For the present, with regard to your work. You have begun well, and my advice is, go on, dear boy, but expand your method. Whether you will ever be a great employer of labour yourself or not, the probability is that you will always be in a position to work for the working-man. Remember that his right is to be housed well, fed and clothed well, and given his fair share of rational fun. I believe that the power to enjoy is as much a gift of God as life itself. If the conditions of his life rob a man of the power to enjoy, which largely consists of the means to develop the best that is in him,—the higher, the spiritual side of his nature; then these conditions are worse than wrong, they are sinful; and the sin is upon those who can alter them and do not. I know what may be objected, that what these people find enjoyable is wallowing in some degrading form of pleasure or vice. Very true of many of them. But the accusation should not be confined to 'these people' alone. There is just as much wallowing in one class as another; but where there is money, the wallowing is done under less repulsive conditions, though not less thoroughly. The people who habitually gorge themselves and indulge their vicious taste in the midst of every elegant appointment that wealth can procure, are just as much pigs in character as the poor degraded beings in the slums whose highest ideal of earthly bliss is to have the means to do likewise—worse, in fact, and more hopeless, for they have had every chance of knowing and doing better. The material in the slums is often more promising. And here education comes in to refine. Teach the working people what to enjoy. They are more teachable, many of them, than their so-called superiors. The pit and gallery applaud the nobler sentiments, the finer forms of heroism, at which the stalls and boxes jeer and yawn. It is in this direction that I would like you to expand. Give up your life to teaching, dear boy, that is my advice to you."

"But on what lines?" Adnam asked.

"On the lines of the Religion of Humanity, which is also the Religion of Christ. Go to the great teachers yourself, and learn—and go to the people, too."

On the way back to the house, the brother and sister dropped

behind, arm in arm; the others, thinking that they might have some last words to say to each other, left them to themselves.

Strelletzen noticed old Emery walking ahead with his sons. "I call that a man," he said, "built to enjoy a hundred years in perfect health of body and mind."

"Oh, I hope so," Ursula ejaculated fervently.

"You did well for yourself, little sister," he said.

She pressed his arm. "And you approve of my boy?" she said. "You will stand by my boy, whatever happens?"

"Adnam has the making of a man in him, and a leader of men," he said thoughtfully.

"How a leader?" she asked.

"His will be spiritual power, developed by moral rectitude; the only lasting power in the universe."

"I am uplifted!" she exclaimed. "But you will stand by him?"

"I could not fail him if I would," Strelletzen answered. "It will be for him to stand by me. He has in him the making of by far the bigger man of the two."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THAT evening old Emery, alone with Adnam and his wife, sitting in his big armchair by the big wood fire in the hall, asked for music.

It happens often, when one phase of our lives is about to close and another to begin, that the regular habits of the closing phase become irksome, the pleasures we have cared for most, suddenly pall. It is a kindly ordering this, which makes the change no wrench, neither a pain nor a pleasure but an effect, to which, even when we would rather not have it so, we are reconciled before we know whither it tends.

Mrs. Pratt was a cultivated musician. Her heart was in her music, and her talent was pronounced. Adnam had inherited it, and to make music together had been the recreation of their own lives since his boyhood, and the delight of his father; who knew enough to appreciate although he could not perform. But that evening neither of them cared to play.

They were willing and did their best, but their spirits halted, and the performance was lifeless. One old favourite after another was taken out and either cast aside at once, or tried and found stale; until at last Mrs. Pratt exclaimed: "We don't seem to be in the mood to-night. I can't keep time and Adnam can't keep in tune. We must give it up."

"Well, well, you've done your best," old Emery answered indulgently, from his big chair by the hearth. "Another time, another time. But could you just manage 'True till Death,' my son? It's been running in my head all day. I seem to hear your mother strike the chords, and you, violin and voice, triumphant . . . 'Echo it! Carry it! . . . True, true till death!'"

He raised his fine old face and looked up as he spoke, and Ursula saw that it shone resplendent as the face of one who, having laid his record down at the Mercy Seat, receives the benediction, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*"

She turned abruptly to the key-board of the piano, and struck the opening notes of the *ritournelle* with her accustomed brilliancy and precision; but Adnam saw that she was trembling and her eyes were full of tears. The instinct to come to her aid nerved him, and he caught up the air on his violin, and sang, with all the consolation that he had it in his heart to offer her, expressed in his fresh young voice.

Old Emery sat silently gazing into the fire for some minutes after the music ceased. He nodded several times as if to punctuate his thoughts. They waited.

"Yes," he said at last, "yes. But now—you warmed to that?"

"We should warm to anything that pleases you," Ursula answered.

"I should like—if it would not weary you—I should like the Dead March, Chopin's."

"Do we do well to think upon death?" she asked, nervously fingering the keys.

"Surely—in music like that," he answered. "It expresses to me, as you and Adnam interpret it, the glorious solemnity of death, the beauty, and the triumph. I know myself in death ennobled; and those I love in death ennobled, so that we die

worthily; and my heart expands for one glad moment in purest gratitude, in perfect love."

Mother and son, with the exchange of a glance and without a word, waked "the sounds that cannot lie" . . . No need of notes; they had the music in their hearts.

Ursula's face was bright when they ended. She closed the piano. Her hands wandered over it a moment as if she were taking leave of it with a lingering caress; then she went to her husband and stood beside his chair.

"I am rather a poor thing to-night," she said cheerfully.

He took her hand and kissed it. The recent parting from her brother was enough to account for her mood.

"Well, well," he said, "a good night's rest— You must go to bed."

He opened the door for her, and watched her go up the broad dark staircase, leaning on her young son's arm. Then he returned to his chair and took up his book, a smilingly contented, happy man.

She and Adnam did not have their usual time together in her sitting-room that night. He persuaded her to take his father's advice and go straight to bed. They parted at her bedroom door, parted merrily. As she said good-night, she held him off with her hands on his shoulders and looked at him.

"You are an uncommonly good-looking fellow, Adnam," she said, summing up the result of her inspection.

"You see me for the first time to-night, I suppose," he answered.

"I begin to know you for the first time, I think," she said.

They kissed and separated.

Adnam went to his room, opened his window wide, and looked out at the weather. He was not anxious, he only wanted to see what it was like. The firmament was resplendent with the cold white glitter of a myriad stars. It was freezing hard, and the night air was intensely still, not a twig moved. Adnam, shivering, closed the window. He had had a long day and was tired out, mentally and physically, and—an unusual thing for him, for it was early still, and he generally sat up late in his room, busy with his books—he went to bed at once, and fell sound asleep.

In the middle of the night he awoke—at least, he thought it

was the middle of the night, for it was pitch dark. He had been sleeping with his arms uncovered, and the cold had roused him; it was intense. He thought of his spring lettuces, *laitue gotte*. Glass is brittle in such a frost, would the *cloches* stand? One comfort, the houses were safe enough, and he was pretty sure of his hot-beds. There was no need to worry; and, indeed, no time; for he was under the clothes and off again, fast asleep, before he was well awake.

The next time he opened his eyes the grey dawn was in the room. Something had roused him with a start, wide awake—what was it? He was conscious of a sense of trouble, of something gone wrong. Seraph! For the first time since he discovered his brother's weakness he had forgotten him. Never before had he gone to bed until he knew that Seraph was safe asleep, drunk or sober. His first impulse was to get up and go to him, but he changed his mind. The dangerous time was over, and obviously nothing untoward had happened, or he would have been roused before. Anyway, there was nothing to be done now. He looked at the clock and made up his mind to enjoy the warmth of his bed until his usual time for rising. There was a pattering on the window panes which he thought was rain, but the blind was down and he could not see. Almost as soon as he noticed the pattering it began to trouble him that he could not see. He wanted to stay in bed, and remonstrated with himself for troubling; but it was no use, he had to get up; and he was at the window looking out before he had done telling himself what an ass he would be to get up in the cold before he was obliged.

It was a patchwork world of slush and snow upon which he looked down. The weather seemed to have had a difference of opinion with itself as to what it meant to do. There had been a fall of snow and a partial thaw; now there was a blizzard blowing, and the frozen particles accounted for the pattering on the window panes.

Adnam dressed hurriedly, wondering at himself for his haste the while, for there was nothing worse to contend against than he had had before in his experience of the weather, and nothing to be done specially; yet he felt and was acting like a man that is called to the rescue.

His hands were numbed with the cold, and he made for the

hearth in the hall when he went downstairs. His father, liberal in all things, had heaped up the logs the night before, and they were still smouldering. Adnam put fresh ones on, and had just got the bellows, when there came from without a sudden startling cry. It was his own men clamouring at the front door, to which they had come because it was nearest. Adnam flung it wide, and was greeted with a shout.

"Oh Lord, sir, come out! Come and see for yourself!"

His first thought was for his men. "What's the matter?" he cried, "who's hurt?"

"No one, thank God! But the Orchard, sir—come and see!"

Good cause for clamour! The Orchard looked as if it had been given over from sundown till daylight to fiends bent on destruction. The bell glasses had been smashed to atoms and the young plants under them trampled in the dirt. The lids of the hot-beds had been pulled off and broken, and their contents torn up by the roots and scattered about. The hot-houses were a litter of broken glass and dying vegetables. The heat had been turned off and the taps turned on to complete the destruction. Where the water had been flowing for hours, there was slush and mud and cat-ice. Nothing that diabolical ingenuity could devise for the purpose had been neglected. Adnam's Orchard was a wreck.

For the first few minutes he stood and looked about him stolidly. The poor boy was stunned.

But the merciful suspension of feeling was of short duration. The blow was too severe for the pain of it not to be felt pretty sharply, but he did not wince; and his father, who joined him presently, brought out by the clamour, found him with his mask on, perfectly cool, apparently, amidst the general consternation. His men clustered round him, but the only expression they gave to their emotion was in their faces. They looked at the havoc wrought, and they looked at him, and waited. Robert Banks was at his elbow, white with rage, but silent. Even the Frenchmen, amazed and subdued by this exhibition of British phlegm, managed to contain themselves, though not for long. Their national vivacity got the better of them, and they soon drew apart, and chattered amongst themselves volubly.

Old Emery laid a kindly sympathetic hand on Adnam's

shoulder, and looked about him. "Well, well," he said; and again, sorrowfully, "Well, well." Then he dug his stick into the ground with a thump. "Who are your enemies, Adnam?" he asked vehemently.

"I have none," Adnam answered, positive because surprised. It had never occurred to him that he could have an enemy.

"There's been devil's work here, then," his father said dryly.

"Or the work of a man mad drunk," slipped from Adnam unawares. The suggestion was followed by a horrid moment of suspense while his father deliberated. He would have made any sacrifice rather than give his father an inkling of the suspicion that beset him.

Old Emery's answer was happily reassuring. "Ay," he said, "a man mad drunk might do as much; but we have no mad drunkards here." Adnam sighed his relief.

Body, the rural policeman, was quickly at the scene of the disaster. The news met him on his morning rounds, with a generous addition of murder and arson to the details to heighten the general effect. Body came expecting to have the time of his life. From his point of view, there was a depressing absence of crime in the neighbourhood. There had never been a poaching affray with loss of life in his time, never anything more exciting than petty larceny, or an occasional drunk and disorderly, on which to exercise his professional skill. But here, he gathered, was a chance for him; and in he marched, his rotund person wobbling with official dignity, and in the carriage of his rocking paunch a curious suggestion of the high estimate he set upon his own importance. He brought handcuffs and was for taking up everybody. Adnam refused to give anybody about the place in charge. He professed absolute confidence in his own men. The strip of ground lying in brown patches ready prepared for planting divided the huts from the part of the Orchard which was covered with glass, and they had not been disturbed during the night for the very good reason that their quarters were too far from the damage done for the noise to reach them. They knew nothing and suspected no one.

"But I must take somebody," Body protested, fingering the handcuffs suggestively.

"Mind your own business," Adnam burst out at last, exasperated by the dispute.

"This is my business," Body retorted, showing the handcuffs, and silencing Adnam with the fact. "If it's not one of your own men, or all of 'em, it's because of 'em. They're foreigners; I know it myself. And nobody 'ereabouts will put up wi' 'aving 'em 'ere. It isn't likely."

"Oh, then that was why you wrecked my Orchard," Adnam answered politely, as though enlightened and obliged.

"I, sir?" Body exclaimed, aghast at the suggestion. "I'm just telling you."

"Save yourself the trouble, then. I don't want to know."

Body scratched his head, and produced an idea. "You're for compounding a felony, perhaps?" he observed sarcastically.

"I'm for being let alone," said Adnam. "Go and arrest the rector. He's to blame. If he'd done his duty and civilised the heathen hereabouts, such a thing would never have happened."

Body went off in dudgeon and took Leonard Pettiblock and Luke Banks in charge, on suspicion, for that they had been heard to use dangerous epithets on the subject of foreigners, likely to excite to a breach of the peace. He marched them off with the whole village in their wake, seething with indignation, every one feeling the shame on themselves of the shameful handcuffs on the young men's wrists. But there was not a tittle of evidence against them. Their time on the night of the outrage was satisfactorily accounted for, and their incendiary language, the point on which Body relied for their committal, proved a point in their favour; for the squire-magistrates had no love for foreigners themselves, and no objection to strong language against such an un-English proceeding as the employment of them on the land. So the accused were marched back to the village in triumph, with songs and shouts, popular heroes, whose presence at the Brabant Arms drew an increase of custom to add to the already thriving business done at that respectable house. And poor Body, upbraided for his officiousness and despised for his failure, was made to suffer enough to reduce his weight many pounds avoirdupois, the loss of which he bitterly lamented, while at the same time making profit of it as evidence of what a man may expect "for doing of his duty."

The incident added painfully to Adnam's perplexities. He felt it laid upon him imperatively to see to it that the innocent

were not made to suffer for the guilty, while at the same time there was the guilty to be screened. One relief he had, the relief from doubt and suspicion; the relief of knowing the truth. After his interview with Body, he went to Seraph direct, and found him in bed. On the table, empty bottles and a guttering candle still alight told their tale of an orgy the night before. Seraph was insensible. His face was haggard, his forehead puckered; he looked like a man in pain. One arm lay outside the coverlet, the hand palm upwards. It was cut in places and there was earth on it, clotted with blood.

Adnam tried to rouse him, but he had not yet had time to sleep off the effect of his potations, and he only succeeded in wringing a groan from him. What was to be done? Get him undressed and decently put to bed seemed the best thing. Adnam stripped off the clothes. Seraph was fully dressed all but his shoes, which were on the floor beside the bed, the patent leather shoes he had worn at supper the night before. They were sodden with moisture now, and bedaubed with mud. Adnam put them outside in the passage to be cleaned.

When he moved Seraph to undress him, he found that he had taken a strange implement to bed with him—an improvised hammer made of a large stone with a hole in it, mounted on a stick. Adnam recognised the stone. It was shaped like the head of a hammer. He had picked it up on the beach one day when he was a little fellow, only just able to carry it, and brought it home because of its curious shape. He dismounted it from the stick, opened the window, and, looking first to be sure that there was no one about to see, threw it down into the garden. With the stone went a damning piece of evidence against his brother. That was a relief. But his young face continued hard and set as he went about his self-appointed task. He left the window wide open to air the room, which was reeking of drink. When he had washed Seraph's hands and plastered the cuts, he saw to the room. The bottles he locked away in a cupboard, but there were still more repulsive results of Seraph's excesses to be cleared up. Adnam shirked nothing.

Having set all in order, he closed the window all but an inch at the top. Any one seeing Seraph now would think he was sleeping naturally, and Adnam left him, believing him safe.

He returned to the Orchard to see what the men were about. They had set themselves to work, and had already made a clearance. The state of the weather left little hope of saving anything; the plants were too delicate to stand exposure to such a temperature. The sky was low and sombre, the wind bitter, and there was a threat of more snow. As Adnam returned to the house, a flake like a white feather was blown towards him. He remembered his mother's fancy of the day before.

She met him in the hall. "Oh, Adnam!" she exclaimed under her breath, holding her hands tight clasped together lest she should wring them.

He kissed her. "Don't distress yourself, mother," he said cheerfully. "The Orchard's there still, and the men are behaving splendidly. We shall have everything going again in a week. And nobody is hurt, you know, so it might have been worse."

Nobody hurt! Dear Adnam, that was so like him! It consoled her more to know him so minded, to see him facing the calamity so bravely, than any attempt he might have made to reassure her as to the extent of his loss could have done.

Breakfast was waiting, and presently old Emery came in. "Where's Seraph?" he said. "Has he gone to Pointz?"

"No," Adnam answered. "He's in bed. Got a chill or something. Bed is the best place for a chill in such weather."

"It's a bad one that'll keep him there," his father said.

"He ought to have the doctor," Mrs. Pratt decided.

"On no account," Adnam exclaimed peremptorily. The doctor might put two and two together.

His mother stared at him, startled by his peremptoriness. He had never before spoken to her in such a tone. And the tone, she knew, was not for her; she saw that in his face; but it meant something. This was a day to look out for signs and tokens. The atmosphere was loaded with portents—if only she could read them!

Adnam, seeing her disturbed, assumed his accustomed stolidity. "Toast, father?" he said, handing him the toast rack, then to his mother: "Seraph can't stand a fuss, you know. He's sleeping now. A good sleep is the best doctor. He's just the opposite of the Old Gentleman when he is sick—anything but a saint."

Old Emery had bent his brows upon the discussion attentively. Now he smiled. "Ay, that's true," he said. "Best let him be."

The talk languished, but nobody would have supposed that anything unusual had happened. Mrs. Pratt had always discountenanced the discussion of unpleasant subjects at meals, and the self-restraint imposed had been perfected by regular exercise.

After breakfast she occupied herself as usual until husband and son had gone out, then she went up to see Seraph. He had not moved, but he was awake, and greeted her with a sickly attempt to smile. He dared not raise his head for the pain of it. There was no mistake about his being all out of sorts.

"Victim of the weather, Seraph?" she asked sympathetically. "Can I do anything for you?"

"If you would send me some strong tea," he answered hoarsely, "and dry toast."

"You shall have it at once," she said. "And your fire must be lit. You won't stir out of bed to-day, I hope. Have you seen Adnam?"

"Not this morning."

Adnam had seen Seraph and reported that he had a chill, but Seraph had not seen Adnam. The discrepancy startled her. What did it mean? The patches of black sticking-plaster on Seraph's hand caught his wandering eye as she asked herself the question. He lifted his hand and looked at it, evidently puzzled.

"You have had an accident," she said.

"An accident—yes," he answered, warily accepting the suggestion. Seeing that she waited, expecting an explanation, he shut his eyes to signify that he could stand no more talk. She took the hint.

As she left the room she noticed Seraph's shoes, all sodden with moisture and bedaubed with mud, outside the door, placed there by Adnam's methodical hand to be taken downstairs and cleaned. She recognised them for the ones he had worn the evening before, and stopped short, her hand pressed to her heart. Patent leather evening shoes in such a state—? When she recovered from the shock, she picked up the shoes, her slim white fingers shrinking like a cat's paw from water with evident

reluctance to touch them, carried them down to her sitting-room, and burnt them.

Adnam coming in hours afterwards found her sitting in her high-backed abbe's chair, her hands on the carved arms in her favourite attitude, her eyes on the fire.

"What a horrid smell," he said, "what have you been burning?"

"The shoes Seraph wore last night," she answered, looking up at him and shaking her head. "You left them to enlighten the whole household *comme pièces de conviction*. There is no capacity for crooked dealing in that fresh-air, straightforward mind of yours, dear son. You would make a poor *intrigant*."

Adnam sat down without a word and stared into the fire. The game of concealment was up so far as his mother was concerned. There was no baffling her penetration once she was on the right track; besides, concealment and deception are not the same thing in such a case. He would not deceive her, and she knew it, and waited for him to reflect and choose his words.

His first generous impulse was to defend his enemy. "It is not so bad as it seems," he said. "He was drunk, mad drunk. He gets so sometimes, and does not know what he is doing."

"I have heard that drink gives a man the courage to do things he would not dare to do when he is sober, things he has a mind to do, if he dared," she replied. "The taps were all turned on last night and the Orchard flooded. When we were there yesterday, I noticed that Seraph struck every tap we passed with his stick, as if he had a grudge against it. I doubt not the mischief was already brewing in his mind."

"Why should he want to injure me?" Adnam exclaimed, more hurt by the unkindness than by the loss of his labour.

She slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't suppose he knows—Drunken men don't know what they do," Adnam repeated. "I cannot think him to blame."

There was a pause during which they both sat, pursuing their separate trains of thought.

"If he does not know," she said at last, "he must be told. He will at least know if the idea of wrecking the Orchard ever entered his head—if he ever thought of such a thing—imagined himself doing it. It should be a lesson to him to control the

meditations of his heart, as well as the words of his mouth. It might, with this propensity that you tell me of, be murder next time, and no mercy shown him. Leave him to me."

"And my father?" Adnam asked.

"I agree with you there," she answered. "I can see no good to be done by inflicting the knowledge upon him—the sorrow and shame. His heart would be broken." She checked herself with her hand on her own heart. "I may be wrong," she broke off. "I don't know. Oh, it is so hard to judge what to do for the best! There is the horror of concealment; and the horror of the consequence if—I can't make up my mind. Tell me about Seraph—all you know. Then leave me to think and pray."

Her agitation passed off as she listened to the simple and direct account that Adnam gave her of how he had accidentally discovered Seraph's weakness, and the course he had pursued with regard to it. It would have been better, she thought, if he had told her at first, but she did not say so. He had acted honourably, doing what seemed to him right and for the best interests of everybody, under the circumstances; and he had shown strength of character, determination and forbearance—qualities to rejoice a mother's heart. Would any one have done better in his place? It is easy to be wise after the event!

When they separated she was quite herself again, and Adnam left her, feeling satisfied on her account, and sustained and comforted by her counsel.

In spite of a bad cold, Seraph was up and at work again next day. In the evening, after supper, he came in from Pointz in a jubilant mood. He looked very spruce in his riding suit with his hat and whip in his hand. Adnam also had just come in. It was the first time the family had all been together since the catastrophe.

"What do you think happened to-day?" Seraph began as soon as he entered the hall. "That eminent detective, Body, came to the squire to take out a warrant for the arrest of—whom do you suppose? Adnam Aubon Strelletzen Pratt for the crime of wrecking his own Orchard, his motive being to defraud the insurance companies of the money for which he had insured his produce!"

There was a moment's dumb amazement, then old Emery

exclaimed, "Well! well!" Mrs. Pratt uttered an inarticulate protest, and Adnam laughed frankly.

"The squire asked Body how he had ascertained that the Orchard was insured," Seraph proceeded. "Body's jaw dropped. He had not ascertained. He had taken it for granted; worked it all out in his own num-skull. I, being present, and happening to know that the produce was not insured, intervened; and Body retired, evidently with a very bad opinion of a young man who had let slip the chance of providing himself with an excellent motive for committing a crime."

"Was your produce not insured, Adnam?" old Emery asked sharply.

"It was not," Adnam answered. His father expressed amazement with a gesture. "I didn't think of it," Adnam added for his information.

This plain statement silenced his father for a little. He considered the matter in all its bearings, then he said decidedly: "I'm to blame. I'm fond of talking about old heads on young shoulders. I should have remembered that boys will be boys. I should have supervised. Your uncle was good at the gardening, but I shouldn't say that he was a shrewd man of business. I am. Yes, I'm to blame, my son. But I'll look into things now for you. I'll ride into Closeminster to-morrow and put the whole thing on a proper business footing. There must be no more amateur experimenting. There never would have been if I had realised your capacity for work—real work, seriously undertaken. Somehow I got it into my head at the start that you were just trying your wings before you took flight, and I've seemed to see you playing with new ideas all the time. Now I see my mistake, and I'll ride into Closeminster to-morrow, and see to it that you are fairly dealt with as you deserve."

He relapsed into thought, and no one spoke for some time. Adnam was feeling too much to express anything for the moment. Seraph stood flicking his legs with his riding whip and hunching his shoulders. He knew that he ought to say something, but he could think of nothing sufficiently politic to guard his own interests and at the same time seem to show the regard for his brother's which was expected of him. He compromised by nodding and smiling enigmatically. His step-

mother had observed him closely without appearing to. She was the first to speak and her words showed Adnam the direction of her thoughts. "How did you know that Adnam had not insured his Orchard?" she asked.

"I, er"—Seraph tee-hee'd—"I inferred it."

His father frowned. "You have plenty to do with insurance one way and another," he said sternly, "why did you not advise your brother?"

Several plausible excuses occurred to Seraph and were rejected. He remembered *qui s'excuse s'accuse*, and finally fell back on Adnam's plea: "I didn't think of it."

Old Emery grunted. He saw the difference between the inadvertence of a boy like Adnam and the neglect of an experienced man like Seraph, but his way was large and laconic. He blamed Seraph and Seraph knew it; that was enough. The weakling waters his position away with a flood of words, the strong man is dry. He expresses the attitude of his mind without talk, and silently leaves his opinion to work its way home undisputed.

Old Emery turned his back on further discussion, and Seraph left the hall. His stepmother stood hesitating. She had not spoken to him yet. Should she follow him now and get the interview over? She decided not to. It was getting late, and if old Emery heard of Seraph being closeted with her at that hour, a thing that had never happened before, he might be troubled. He would not insist on knowing the reason if she did not tell him voluntarily. She could rely on his delicacy, but not on the chance of his being undisturbed by an unusual occurrence, especially just now when there was so much going on that was food for conjecture. Once on the alert he was shrewd enough, and a trifle might set him on the alert at any moment. She decided to talk to Seraph at a more convenient season.

The trouble of her mind with regard to Seraph's delinquencies betrayed itself in restlessness and preoccupation. She was conscious that her husband was observing her closely. His vigilance when anything that concerned her well-being was in question never lapsed. She hoped that Adnam's misfortune would account to him for her uneasiness. If only she knew what to do for the best! That was the cry of her heart. She

felt separated from her husband by the dreadful secret. But always, when she tried to make up her mind once for all, the same tragic possibilities presented themselves. If she told him, he would never be the same man again; if she kept back the knowledge she would be deceiving him. Which would be best or worst? She could not determine.

She glided away to her sitting-room soon after Seraph left them, leaving her husband and son alone together in the hall.

"Is your mother not well?" old Emery asked. "She seems uneasy. Do you know of any special reason for it?"

"Reason enough, father, is there not?" Adnam answered diplomatically.

His father nodded his head several times.

"Perhaps I had better go to her?" Adnam suggested, anxious to escape further questioning.

"Ay," his father, full of reflection, answered deliberately. "That's the thing to take her out of herself—you and your future!" Significant nods indicated the foregone conclusion.

Adnam found his mother sitting in her accustomed seat by the hearth. He saw at once that her mood had changed since she left the hall. The anxious expression had gone. The beautiful spirit within shone, expectant, through its pale refinement as through a transparent veil. There was the rapt look in her eyes of one who is waiting for the revelation of Reality in the Uncreated Light. With a background of crimson curtain, sitting upright in her abbess chair, the dark wood of which and the black and white of her draperies, accentuated the ascetic beauty of her face—she looked like the saintly embodiment of a *chanoinesse* of other days, prepared for high conference, awaiting the event.

She held out her hand to Adnam by way of greeting. He raised it to his lips, and, stepping back, sat down in the chair opposite. Subdued into harmony with the still atmosphere that surrounded her, grave and reverent as in a sacred place, incapable as well as unwilling to disturb the brooding mood that enwrapt her, he waited, like one with a spell upon him; and in his attitude and in his face something of herself appeared that was not visible at ordinary times.

The cloistral simplicity of the room showed dimly by the light of the one standard lamp, crimson shaded, standing in the

corner behind him. There was a wood fire burning dully in the open fireplace. Windows and doors were tight shut, and curtains closely drawn. There could be no draught; yet there came the chill, as of a cold breath on hands and face. Adnam shivered; his mother's eyes grew fixed and unseeing. She seemed to be listening intently.

"The sea is strangely insistent to-night," she said at last. "I hear it crashing on a pebbly beach."

"How can that be, mother?" he asked. "This is a sandy shore, and the night is still. Besides, the sea is too far off to be heard by us at all, shut in as we are, even if it were raging."

She paid no attention to what he said, but gradually she ceased to listen, and relapsed into thought.

"Adnam——"

"Yes, mother."

"I entreat you to remember. The power to pray may be withdrawn."

"I promised you," he said. "I will not let it go."

"You know what I mean," she pursued. "Not the vulgar petition but the attitude of mind, the inarticulate direction of the whole being by the aspiration of the spirit upwards; that sublime yearning towards the Infinite, that uplifting which yields the rapture of perfect Love, in glorious moments of communion with the Divine."

"I try to understand," he answered humbly.

"Do not try to understand," she said. "There is no understanding. Hold yourself ready to experience. Believe me, if you rise but once into communion with the Power and the Glory, you will never let go the hope of returning, though all things that men desire most upon earth were offered you in exchange for it."

Adnam reflected. "I am ashamed to pray for anything I want," he said at last.

"Any material thing I hope you mean," she answered. "That is right. It is trifling to strive for a cup of happiness when the ocean itself is within reach. I am convinced that the power which answers such prayers is not the highest. Man does not yet know the extent of his own powers. Water and light and air have been weighed, but we only talk of the weight

of thought. It may be that the thought of a strong mind directed of set purpose to another mind has power to move it. It may affect a million minds at once. Something does, though by no means always for good. How else account for the simultaneous occurrence of the same idea to individuals widely separated from each other, not only by space but by language, and every condition of life which makes it improbable that they should think alike? That there is such a thing as thought-transference is held to be proved, I believe. Your uncle declares that mind-waves of incalculable force may be formed of thought by concentration. In ardent prayer, our whole being is concentrated on what we desire. We are *willing*, as well as asking, to have. Most of us who pray repeat 'not my will but Thine be done,' but seldom sincerely. The words are a formula. In the same way, when we are persuading a friend to do us a favour, we say, 'I don't like to trouble you,' but all the time our will is set on having the favour granted. Man's will is at work in the universe as well as God's will. Man may work with God and he may work against Him. When he works with God, it is for his own benefit in the long run; when he works against God, using his own judgment to decide what it is good for him to have, he finds at the last that he has been working against his own best interests all the time. The beginning of wisdom for man is to learn to distinguish between his own will and the will of God."

Adnam's clear eyes had grown more like her own as he listened. The words sank in, but it was not until long afterwards that he realised how deeply, or understood that in these days he had been privileged to walk with one of those strange rare women who, from generation to generation, keep the lamp alight which guides men's feet into the way of peace.

There was a long silence, during which he began to be conscious of something unwonted in the atmosphere. The shadows deepened. He thought the lamp was going out, and turned to see. It was burning brightly. The chill, as of a cold air breathing on his hands and face, made him shiver again. He stirred the logs to a blaze, and the light was there, yet the darkness was gathering. He had an inexplicable sensation as of a great silence about him, and, at the same time, as of something sounding in the silence. He tried to account for it in

order to shake off the effect, which was awesome. He remembered that in a room on the sheltered side of a house this combination of silence and sound, silence within and sound without, may be experienced when a gale is blowing.

"The wind is rising," he said at last.

"That is not the wind," his mother answered, in a voice that seemed to come from far away. She was sitting rigid in her chair, her hands on the arms, her eyes wide open but unseeing, her expressionless face witnessing to a consciousness which was not of the senses. "That is not the wind."

"Surely, mother!" he protested.

"Open the window and see."

He did so and leant out. It was a moonlight night, exquisitely still, not a breath was stirring. Startled, he shut the window, drew the curtains across it, and returned to his seat. He said nothing, but looked at his mother. Her unseeing eyes met his. It seemed to him that she was again listening intently. He had no need to strain his attention. A great gale was blowing round the house, a cataract of wind. He could not have shut out the sound of it if he would.

"Mother," he exclaimed in affright, "mother, surely there is a storm raging? Or am I mad?"

Her unseeing eyes were still upon him. He knew what that meant, he had seen her so before. It was as if he were alone with her body, awaiting the return of her spirit.

He called his courage to his aid (he needed it all), controlled himself, and tried to think, to reason. The wind howled and wailed in gusts, battered at the windows, shook the house. He told himself that he must have been mistaken; that it was when he looked out that his senses played him false; that the night was not still; that the trees were being lashed past endurance, and the expression of their resentment was distinct in his ears amidst the uproar of the wind. But he did not convince himself and, at last, impatient of what he thought his folly, he opened the window once more to settle the question.

Not a breath was stirring. The moonlight shone pure on the quiet land. The trees were as tranquil as the shadow of the house. No distant murmur of the sea was perceptible.

After the racket in the room the instantaneous cessation of all sound was stunning, a blank. It was to Adnam as if he had

been suddenly struck stone deaf, while at the same time the swift rush of his own blood was distinct to his consciousness as though it roared in his ears. The sensation turned him sick. He groaned.

His mother's voice came to him, as from afar off. She raised a warning hand. "Be passive," she implored.

He shut the window and again covered it with the curtain. Instantly the racket recommenced. "Be passive!" she repeated.

He staggered back to his seat. And thereupon his mind became void of all speculation. Sense was suspended. Did he sleep? He never knew. But when consciousness returned there was nothing abnormal to disturb him, yet he experienced a shock of acute distress; for he found his mother in an agony of grief, weeping and wringing her hands.

Adnam was out early next morning superintending the righting of his wrecked Orchard. The radiant spring sunshine made the wanton havoc wrought, pitilessly apparent. Where all had been order and rich fertility was now unlovely wreckage, a blighted and blackened crop. His men thought it no wonder that there was none of the usual underlying cheerfulness in his habitual gravity that day. Everything looked hopeless enough to dishearten him, and the disappointment of his heavy loss might well be weighing upon his mind.

His father came down to breakfast ready dressed for his ride into Closeminster. His mother looked a shade paler, a shade more ethereal, but otherwise she seemed as usual, until old Emery's horse was brought round; then she began to show signs of disquiet.

"You must go to-day?" she said.

"Dear heart, I must," he answered. "I must see the boy righted. And the ride will do me good. The morning is grand for a ride." He turned to Adnam. "I take the repairs on myself," he said. "I shall give the necessary orders. At my expense, you understand?"

"You overwhelm me, father," Adnam stammered.

"That's all right," old Emery rejoined.

"I wish you were not going," his wife said, looking up at him wistfully.

He looked at her, large and laconic. "Well, well," he said, shaking his head.

She felt herself reproached as unreasonable. This set her thinking, and her intuition failed her. "I am foolish," she said, passing her hand over her eyes as if to clear her sight. "Of course you must go."

"That's *my* lady," he said, with lingering emphasis. He kissed her, mounted his horse, and slowly rode away. But he only rode to the turn of the drive. There he pulled up, and sat on his horse deliberating. Then he turned back. He found her alone in the hall.

"I thought you had gone, dearest!" she exclaimed.

"Did you, now!" he said, laughing at her. "I've a word to say to Adnam first."

He found Adnam in the Orchard. "Go to your mother, my son," he charged him solemnly. "She's nervous to-day. She must not be left alone. Stay with her till I return."

He re-entered the hall by the side door, and took a turn or two up and down. She waited, twisting and untwisting her fingers.

"Well, good-bye," he said at last, and kissed her again. "My lady, my little lady. Adnam will take care of thee for me. God be with thee till we meet again."

She watched him ride away, a grand figure of a man finely mounted on a beautiful horse. Once he turned and waved his hand, then he was gone.

Adnam found her sitting by the fire in the hall, busy with a piece of needlework. The fear that had been upon her for the last two days had suddenly left her. She was quite tranquil, quite herself.

"Lazy boy," she said, smiling a playful reproach. "What are you doing indoors at this time of day?"

"Waiting for the things my father is to send from Closterminster," he replied. "There's nothing for me to do now till they come, so I must make holiday with you. Come out into the sunshine! It is lovely, out of doors. The spring is full on the land."

He had come in much disturbed about her, but was reassured by her manner, and they spent the day together happily. He offered to read to her in the afternoon, but she preferred

to talk, and they sat by the fire in the hall. She talked incessantly, almost in monologue, speaking above him now and then, addressing his understanding as it would be, rather than as it was, and always as if there were much that she desired to say and had but little time to say it in. It was the future she had in her mind, she scarcely touched upon the present; and only upon the past in so far as the future was likely to be determined by it—as when she referred to Lena Kedlock, and warned him that they would meet again.

“Not if I can help it,” Adnam said bitterly.

“It is natural that you should feel so at present,” she answered.

“How do you know that it is natural?” he asked in surprise. “I never betrayed her—never told you——”

“The details are unimportant, my son. When Seraph came in that day and flung the news of her runaway marriage at us, you betrayed yourself—to me, at least. The others saw nothing but surprise in your face. I saw much more. You can keep your countenance ordinarily; nobody better. And nothing but a sudden and severe shock would have caused it to change as it did. Why should Lena’s marriage be such a shock to you? Your father used to jest about the way she ran after you. You are no trifler with girls yourself, therefore it was likely that you had taken her seriously. Dear boy, what was there to tell? But stop me if you dislike the subject.”

“No, since you know so much. I would like to hear what you have to say. I cannot tell you anything myself about Lena——”

“Of course not. But let me generalise a moment about men and girls. Flirtatiousness in a lively girl is only a form of mischief—somewhat reprehensible, I allow, but natural. Those who should have taught her better are to blame. What interests her is the effect she produces on the man. She has a mixed feeling of amusement and contempt; and also of surprise at her own power. She despises the weakness of the man, but may pity him if she is kindly. Otherwise her feelings are unaffected. She is merely playing a game, and neither expects nor wishes to be taken seriously. The mistake is to take her seriously while she is only playing. Her levity, so long as she keeps it up, is proof enough that she is not serious.”

"Mother, what a flirt you must have been!" Adnam exclaimed.

Mrs. Pratt laughed and blushed. "Is that a fair attack, my son?" she demanded.

"At all events, you must have repented of your levity in my father's favour," he rejoined. "For that I commend you."

This little rally enlivened them, but Adnam's brightness was soon overcast.

"She certainly misled me," slipped from him unawares.

His mother defended her: "It was not like her to do that. I should have expected her to have warned you."

"Well, I suppose she did," Adnam acknowledged upon reflection. He was very sore, but he was trying to be just. The soreness had been as much on Lena's account as on his own all the time, that she could stoop to beguile. He had not vowed that he would never believe in a girl again. A man with such a mother grows up above silliness of that kind. If his wound is open, so also is his mind, and both are healthy—no morbid state in either—a condition which makes for wholesome healing. Adnam remembered that Lena had always said that she meant to marry Eustace; remembered the times, too, when she laughingly declared that she only wanted to kiss him—the minx! She was playing the game openly all the time; what a fool he had been! "I see now. She did not mean to mislead me," he owned up honestly. "I misunderstood her. When she was jesting I thought her in earnest, and *vice versa*. What I wanted to believe, I believed. I am glad you have cleared this up for me. It was self-deception—conceit. Now I shall owe her no grudge."

"Dear my son, I see in you the beginnings of wisdom!" she flashed at him, bantering; but she was serious again the next moment. "Let me tell you about Lena to prepare you to be her friend in the days to come. She will want friends who understand her, and will have few enough."

"Why are you so sure that we shall meet again?" he asked. "Our worlds are very different."

"On the contrary," she answered quietly. "Her world is yours——"

Seraph came in at the side door just then, and passed through the hall, with frowning forehead and smiling lips. The

smile was lip-service, a conventional acknowledgment of their presence. He had been about the place all day, and was very morose, because he had had to see to things in his father's absence which kept him at home when he wanted to be at Pointz. His appearance changed the current of her thoughts, sending them back from the future to the past, to the origin of a grievance of Seraph's against her for which she had begun to see some justification in these latter days.

"It is my fault that you have not been associating with her on equal terms all along," she said. "The county received me kindly enough. Seraph blames me. He thinks he would have been in a better position now had I been more sociable——"

"Like his impudence," Adnam interrupted.

"He has the courage of his opinions."

"He has the courage that will stab in the back."

"When he is in his right mind?" she put it to him.

He could not in fairness say so, neither could he be sure of the contrary, so he compromised with a dogged: "I don't know." She thought it better to drop the subject. "I was going to tell you about Lena Kedlock," she said. "You have been thinking that she amused herself by making you care for her, and that she did not care for you at all. On the contrary, she cared for you intensely—while she was with you; for it was not an admirable form of caring. The excuse for her is that she was attracted in spite of herself. Your attraction for her was physical." The blood mounted to Adnam's forehead. "If she met you again it might be the same thing." He made a gesture. "That offends you? Don't let unpalatable truths offend you. Face them and study them. It is upon knowledge that wisdom depends. Learn what the fact is, then find out why it is so. When you have mastered both cause and effect, then you will know what to think; and if you have to act, let the code of honour determine your conduct. Lena made you suffer. I saw how much. You have blamed her, you have been bitter against her; and the blame and the bitterness have doubled your sufferings. If you could have pitied her, it would have been better for yourself."

"It would," he assented.

"Well, her case is altogether pitiable," his mother proceeded. "The flesh, when it is in the grip of passion, has its own arguments, against which the appeal of reason is powerless—if the

mind has not been trained to control and regulate the feelings. This accounts for marriages which would otherwise be inexplicable; the marriage, for instance, of a refined woman with a common man." She was thinking of Godiva Pointz, of whose infatuation for Seraph she was well aware. "Sensation is the most potent factor in the production of irrational inference. At close quarters the attractions of sex are pleasurable. Because the man's presence produces a sensation which is physically agreeable, the girl infers that, although his manners may be at fault, she will find in his nature in other respects, on intimate association, only what is agreeable. Passion sees what it requires for its own nourishment whether it be in its object or not, and is blind to anything that might be destructive of itself. The only successful opponent of passion is principle. A man or woman with a well-ordered mind will not be safe from the attacks of passion, but they will be able to resist them—if, that is to say, they have the knowledge of themselves and of human nature generally, which is requisite. Lena is at the mercy of her sensations because she is quite untaught. She has a serious side to her mind which has saved her so far from any great indiscretion. But her senses tolerate what her conscience would not sanction if she had been trained to act on principle. She has not. Moreover, her nature is dual. Lena Kedlock is a beautiful soul caged in a corrupt body, and the two will be incessantly at war, until one or the other is triumphant. When you meet her again, let me pray you to be on the side of her soul."

"I understand," he said seriously. "You fear that she will be the victim of heredity?"

"To a certain extent," his mother answered. "Heredity in her case would account for impulses which are of physical origin; it does not account for her soul. To understand that you must understand your religion. When Christ asked His disciples, '*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*' they replied, '*Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*' What did that mean? It meant that it was common knowledge at that time that the dead return."

"Then you believe in reincarnation? I thought you were a Christian?"

"I am. That is why I believe in reincarnation. You can-

not be a Christian if you reject the belief in reincarnation. It is a fundamental part of the Christian religion, and was taught by the Church until the fifth century, when it was declared to be a heresy by the Second Council of Constantinople. It is easy to understand why it was ruled out of the Church! Ambitious ecclesiastics found a powerful weapon for their purposes in the everlasting fires of hell. From the time that they assumed the right and the authority to consign any living soul they chose to eternal damnation, they made the Spiritual Power (so-called) of the Church the arbiter in all things temporal. There was no man too great to be whipped to heel by the lash of that threat, and we know how it was used, and how all-powerful it was to keep the ignorant masses cowering in subjection. You must read Gibbon on that subject; also—and better still—the dry Gregorovius. They will be a revelation to you. And on the side of reincarnation, read Origen, read St. Jerome. Above all, study the poets—the poets who, of all men, are the most often inspired, the most closely in touch with the Divine.

*“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar.”*

“We say in the creed, ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body’; what we should say is, you think, ‘I believe in the reincarnation of the soul’?” Adnam suggested.

“Yes,” she nodded, satisfied. “It is upon this difference that the salvation of man depends. The only religious tenet that is certain of any wide appeal nowadays is that which assures us that we have higher powers still awaiting development by the life we lead; and that time is given us—time to develop the best that is in us during successive reincarnations. This satisfies our sense of justice as nothing else does—Divine Justice. It accounts for the sufferings of children.”

“Does it account for them?”

“Yes. We reap what we have sowed.”

“Then you think that Lena——?”

“Lena is expiating her past in a body doomed by heredity to make her soul suffer. It may be that she has corrupted

others in her time, and is therefore condemned by her own action to experience the evil she wrought. Those who do evil come back to be purged of their sins by suffering. But the man who labours for the good of others, who lives the best life he can, will, when he comes again, be a still better man, endowed in a greater degree with the powers he has already cultivated, even, it may be, with higher powers—the further faculty.”

Adnam drew a deep breath. “There is certainly a fine incentive to goodness in this teaching, from the point of view of a glorified self-interest. It draws me. I must follow it up,” he said.

“You will find in it the solution of all spiritual difficulties,” she answered, “and you will learn from it not to blame. Never blame,” she insisted. “Try to understand. Be pitiful, be tender—if for no nobler motive, then because harshness re-acts disastrously on your own peace of mind. But try to become possessed by the nobler motive. Try to rise above personal considerations. There are men who glorify barren individualism. There is no such thing. We are all incorporated in the great body of life; atoms composing it; but important atoms, capable of causing serious local disturbance, even of undermining the health of the whole body. The attitude of each atom towards the rest matters greatly; if it be friendly, it is a source of strength; if it be unfriendly, suffering must ensue. The life which each individual leads is far-reaching in its consequences for good or evil. When you go out into the world, I should like to think that you will devote yourself to the service of mankind. Make yourself familiar with foreign tongues—you speak three languages already—and teach the people. Show them the awful, inevitable, and needless suffering which must result so long as the rulers of the world insist that the work of the world shall be carried out, as it is being carried out at present, grossly, for material purposes, by material means, with selfish material interests in view. Teach the people. Show them that they have it in their own power to stretch out friendly hands to each other from nation to nation; that war, as a method of settling differences of opinion, is a remnant of barbarism and a disgrace to civilisation; that friendly co-operation between the nations is as possible as it is desirable. Teach them to bring into politics the moral influence which has

hitherto been so sadly wanting. See to it that they rise above petty party considerations (parties are the puppets made use of by ambitious men to further their own interests); and devote themselves whole-heartedly to the study of each question as it arises on its own merits. The narrow view makes for mischief always. There are two sides to every question, remember, and it is only when both sides are seen clearly and disinterestedly, that justice is done. It is not the custom of nations at the present time to allow anything but material self-interest to weigh with them in the regulation of their political relations; this is the cause of all the confusion. If the moral and spiritual element is not admitted into our councils, all that raises human nature above the brute is excluded, and the action taken in consequence must be brutal. The principle of help-one-another is set aside, and instead of studying to promote international co-operation, which would result in universal peace and prosperity, we see the nations armed for brigandage, ready to spring at each other's throats, snatching from each other any morsel they may covet. Teach the people to appreciate their power and to use it nobly, then the great movement in the upward progress of mankind, which is needed to bring about the Parliament of man and the Federation of the World, will at last take place. Do I weary you, my son?"

"You inspire me," he replied.

She had brought in a vivid scarlet flower from the conservatory in her garden, and was toying with it as she spoke. She dropped it now, accidentally. He stooped to pick it up.

"The red badge of courage!" he said, and fixed it in the heavy coils of her pale hair. "There!" he exclaimed, standing off to admire her, with his head on one side. "You wanted that touch of colour. Now you are perfectly lovely."

She smiled up at him, a happy, satisfied smile. "You are an uncommonly good-looking fellow, Adnam!" she said.

It was only the second time in his life that she had paid a compliment to his personal appearance. The first time—it recurred to him swiftly—was in the same words on the night of the catastrophe. He bent to kiss her. As he raised his head, the door behind her was hurriedly opened, and he saw Seraph come in from the inner hall—not the morose Seraph of to-day, nor the affectedly genial Seraph of the day before, who had

brought them the joke about Body and the warrant for Adnam's arrest, and told it with his little tee-hee laugh, and the furtive glance at his stepmother and Adnam which always meant malice. This was another and, for the moment, a better man; but a man in sore distress. Adnam, startled by what he saw in his face, stared at him blankly.

"What is it?" Ursula asked casually, hearing the door open and half turning her head.

"Only Seraph," Adnam managed to answer.

Seraph came out well in this. Still standing behind her so that she could not see his white face and trembling hands, he controlled his voice. "I want Adnam a moment, if you will excuse him," he said. "You will wait here for him, lady?"

Seraph in a good mood always called her "lady." The word was a caress, and she was pleased that he had used it now. Adnam would see confirmation of his kindness in what she had been saying. "I can't promise," she answered.

Adnam caught the meaning of a glance from Seraph and supported the suggestion. "Yes, wait here till we return, mother dear," he urged. "We will have tea here together."

She smiled compliance.

Seraph, in great agitation, when he had closed the door between the two halls, leant against the jamb, too overcome to speak at first. "Father," he gasped finally. "They're bringing him. Fallen from his horse. They found him——" sobs choked his utterance.

"Not——?" Adnam was just able to articulate.

"Yes. Quite."

Adnam clenched his fists in a brave effort to control himself. His first thought was of his mother.

Seraph grew more collected. "Keep her in the hall till——" he glanced at the stairs. "They are bringing him. She will hear the trampling. It can't be helped. She must be told."

The best that was in Seraph appeared now. His sympathy was mute but genuine. He grasped Adnam's shoulder, shook his hand expressively. "Go to your mother," he said, with a break in his voice. "God help her!"

"Go to your mother!" The last injunction his father had laid upon Adnam.

He found her contentedly waiting for him, unforeboding, the "red badge of courage" still in her hair.

Some labourers had found old Emery lying by the wayside, his good horse standing beside him shivering, with both knees broken. He had evidently come down—caught his foot in a hole, it was supposed; he had been cantering on the grass—and old Emery, though a fine rider, taken unawares, had been thrown. His neck was broken.

Seraph shot the horse that evening. He could neither bear to keep him nor to let him pass unsound into other hands to be degraded. He had not deserted his master on earth. Let his spirit pass, if it might, without pain, to serve him on the plains of heaven. Adnam approved. At such times, from secret recesses of our being, deeply implanted scraps of comfort come in rites to be observed, survivals from the childhood of the race, when faith was formed of poetic fancy, and the gods in mercy gave to the living the solace of something still left that love could do for the dead.

Ursula Pratt was calm. In the first hours of her bereavement she chose to be alone with her dead. With her own hands she had made all beautiful about him, laid on his breast "the white flower of a blameless life"; spread out on a high altar the comforting symbols of his faith; lighted candles to chase away the terror that lurks in darkness; and taken her stand upon her right to watch beside the beloved form while it might still be with her.

During the first hours of the night her mind was a chaos of impressions. As she sat beside him, her own words haunted her, a refrain to every other thought: "Do we do well to think upon death?—" The candles flickered. There were movements of people without. The troubled household had not yet retired to rest. The accustomed round of life was being fulfilled; and he had no further part in it. There he lay, a noble figure, "built to enjoy a hundred years," but now—what?

"Do we do well to think upon death?"

An angry blast shook the house. She was reminded of the phantom forewarning of storm by which Adnam's nerves had been racked. The reality was upon the land to-night, a devas-

tating reality long remembered on that countryside. The wind roared in the open chimney, it wailed at the windows, it rattled the casements, it threatened, it rebuked, it pleaded mournfully—a sorrowful spirit entreating to be let in. The candles flickered. Deceived by the uncertain light, she suffered a shock of hope, familiar enough to watchers by the dead. She mistook the effect of the moving shadows for a change in the expression of his face. For a moment she thought that life had returned. She sprang to her feet. She bent over him. Marble still and cold, but, oh, so kindly! Pained, too, she fancied, as if he knew of her pain, and was powerless to help her.

She flung herself on her knees beside the bed, her forehead touching his hand, the hand that had never failed her——

“Come back!”

The death chamber echoed to the cry; the wind caught it up and bore it away. Mercy drew a veil. There was no human witness of the long hours of frantic grief, of conflict, of infinite pain, before the moaning ceased, and the broken heart had rest.

“I shall go to him——”

The words murmuring in her heart arose and passed to the portals of heaven, and the death chamber was filled with the peace that follows on faith in the glad assurance.

It was a nightmare time to Adnam, a time of horrible unrealities in the midst of which he moved among realities still more horrible. Shock followed shock. His mother was not the lone watcher she supposed herself that night. A prey to anxiety on her account, as well as to grief, he had stationed himself without in the corridor, a faithful sentry on guard. He might not be with her, and he could not desert her; to stay there close at hand was all that he could do for her. A strange medley of thoughts beset him, out of which there sorted themselves clearly some words of hers: “I believe there is power in prayer to influence the current of life enormously, if we pray for the possible.” He threw himself on his knees and prayed passionately for her, that she might not suffer, that she might have peace. While the power to supplicate lasted, he lost himself in the fervour and passion of prayer. He was not even conscious of the storm, then at its height, howling, raging, buffeting the old house with blows like a battering ram, that

made it tremble. But, suddenly, he found himself listening instead of praying, yet it was not the racket that he heard. He did not hear, in fact, he felt—felt that there was some one moving in the house. There was a tense moment, then Seraph, in shirt and trousers, his braces swinging behind him, his hair all tousled, his lip lifted in an ugly snarl like a vicious cur, turned into the corridor, staggering. Adnam's presence of mind did not desert him. He was on his feet in time to meet him half-way and bar the passage.

"This is my house," Seraph growled. "I'll have no Popish practices here—crucifixes, candles, mummary. I'll tear them down, and turn the Scarlet Woman out."

"You'll not make a scandalous scene here to-night," Adnam answered. "You'll go back to your room and behave with decency. Pull yourself together, man. For God's sake, Seraph, pull yourself together——"

Seraph clutched at his throat, but Adnam, his superior in strength though not in height, and too quick for him, caught him round the waist and tripped him up. They came to the ground with a thud, and Adnam, undermost, had to fight, not only for his mother and the sanctity of the death chamber, but for his very life. After a desperate struggle he got the upper hand and held Seraph down, silencing his drunken delirium by half throttling him until the poison in his brain had spent its strength, when they both lay, the one insensible in sleep, the other also exhausted, but cruelly conscious of the misery that was, and of the misery that might be yet to come. He felt no ill-will towards Seraph. He was sorry for him. He understood and excused him. Seraph had been tenderly attached to his father, bound to him by strong ties of habit and respect, as well as of affection. His grief had overwhelmed him, and his powers of endurance had been sapped by his evil habit. Being in such pain, the temptation to drug himself was great, and it was inevitable, perhaps, that he should yield to it. Fortunately, the noise of the scuffle was drowned by the howling violence of the wind, and no suspicion of the ghastly occurrence ever leaked out.

The days that followed were terrible to Adnam, an age of pain. There were strange noises downstairs, strange people

about, a nightmare crowd. His mother stayed in her own room, and he waited on her, or sat beside her chair, his hand on hers as it rested on the arm. Her unnatural calm continued. Sometimes she spoke, but she neither smiled nor wept, and there was always a wide outlook in her eyes, as if she saw far beyond the range of mortal vision. She was expectant rather than unhappy; Adnam was sure of that, and it was a comfort to him. She appeared to him at this time as a spirit, with no background but a luminous cloud.

From far and wide people flocked to the funeral, gentle and simple, to pay a last tribute of respect to one who had set an example of what a man should be in every relation of life. The duke himself could not have had more honour shown him, they said, and it was no wonder that Mrs. Pratt bore up so well, especially with such a son to be a comfort to her. For in these moving movements it was generally allowed that Adnam framed to be just such another as his father. They said he looked noble, standing there in the sunshine, bareheaded, beside the grave. Beryl the Beautiful watching him, with Paul MacAllen Ray at her side, suddenly glowed with passion. She wanted Adnam. All the same, she would have taken Seraph now, or rather Pratt's Place, with Seraph thrown in. And Godiva Pointz would get Seraph! Oh, she would take him, and gladly! Men were scarce! Even there, in the shadow of the old grey church, with the dead at her feet, amid the reverent silence of the mourners, untouched either by the occasion or by the solemn service which, with strange power, bowed her lover's spirit to the earth and at the same time exalted it to heaven—Beryl rose not, even for a moment, above her sensuous self.

Ursula, leaning on Adnam's arm, looked down into the grave with strange composure. He was not there. All that was there did not matter now. Nothing mattered, the time was so short.

The little duchess was beside her. She had flown to support her beloved friend. Human as ever, her heart where it should be, but her mind, as usual, all over the place, she stood there now, alternately raising her lorgnette to look about her for any irrelevant distraction that might occur, or dabbing her eyes with an inadequate morsel of lace and gossamer. She had

been in attendance on her Royal Lady when the terrible news arrived, but she had only to tell it to be excused. The widow was sure of sympathy from that sad, kind widowed heart, and the duchess was despatched at once with comforting words.

She returned with Ursula to Pratt's Place and helped Adnam to minister to her, talking all the time: "Sit in your own chair here, dearest. I'll take your bonnet. Here, Adnam, take off her gloves. Now, you look like yourself! But, dearest, you must cry, you know. You must cry. Try, dearest. It isn't safe—and there is Adnam! Do you remember 'Home they brought her warrior dead, she nor spake nor uttered cry, all the people watching said, she must weep or she will die. Then they whispered soft and low, called him worthy to be loved'—and I'm sure he was—'truest friend and noblest foe—Rose a nurse of ninety years sat his child upon her knee'—Oh, Adnam!" wringing her hands—"I wish you were a baby!"

It seemed to be foolish chatter, but there was wisdom in it, the wisdom of generations of loving women who had rushed to the rescue, taught by fear. The tears never came, but she won a precious smile.

Ursula pressed her hand. "Dear friend!" she said. "Adnam! beloved son——"

She clutched at her heart, gasped, and fell forward. The duchess caught her in her arms. "Wine!" she cried.

Adnam sped along the corridor and down the stairs. His first feeling was that he must find his father! where was his father? He remembered. Where, alas! The nightmare was heavy upon him, a nightmare of men in the hall. They had come in with Seraph after the funeral in sign of sympathy; also as a tribute to the new ownership of Pratt's Place. Seraph had broken down at the grave, but now he was listening complacently to *Vive le Roi!* The doctor was amongst them. Adnam sent him to his mother, and would have followed him, but one and another barred the way. As in a nightmare, he entreated to be allowed to pass, but they took no notice, and the more he struggled to be free, the more they hampered him.

At last he was back in his mother's room, and here again were people—he never knew who. Where was his mother? And what was there on the floor that they were all crowding

round? Why did they try to hide it from him? Why did they keep him off?

It was the little duchess, kindest of women, who made him understand. Claspings both hands round his arm and looking up at him with streaming eyes, she sobbed: "Adnam, dear boy, let me be your mother now!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SERAPH was fond of saying that he always began as he meant to go on, and he was well away, striding about, shooting out his shirtcuffs, and giving orders as master of Pratt's Place, before his father was in his grave. Immediately after that event, however, it appeared that his position was doubtful, and a short interregnum ensued, during which he and Adnam attended to their usual respective duties as they would have done had their parents' absence been only temporary. The interval was made necessary by a doubt about their father's will. The only one to be found had been made at the time of his second marriage. In it he had made ample provision for his dear wife during her lifetime, in the shape of an annuity chargeable upon the estate. The estate itself he bequeathed to his son Seraph. No mention was made of Adnam for the very good reason that there was no Adnam at that time to be mentioned. If this old will held good, Adnam would be left penniless. No one who had known Emery Pratt could believe for a moment that he had made no will since Adnam was born. A man so careful and methodical, so just in all his dealings, so keenly alive to his duty towards his neighbours, could not, it was argued, have neglected so obvious a duty towards his younger son. It would have been a negation of his own principles and his whole life. But search where they would, in drawers, cupboards and boxes, lawyers' offices, and the memories of old friends, no other will was to be heard of or found. Considering what human nature is, there was nothing so extraordinary in this as people tried to make out. When it comes to making a will, the best men with the best intentions have been known to procrastinate until it was too late. Those, especially, who have the lovely leisure

of the land always about them, have to be specially roused to do unaccustomed things. Emery's idea had always been to put Adnam in the way of becoming independent by his own exertions. For this purpose he would have been obliged, in all probability, to spend on him as much as he could have left him. He had doubtless waited first of all in order to see what was best to be done with the boy; then had come this experiment in the Orchard, and the spending had begun. The only thing that remained inexplicable was his not having secured the Orchard or some equivalent as provision for Adnam in case of his own premature demise. That he had not done so was inexplicable, and so it remained. Adnam felt no bitterness about it. He persuaded himself that his parents could know nothing now of the plight in which he was left, and it consoled him to think that they, at all events, would not be grieved. Seraph would have been straight enough in an affair of the kind. Had a will fallen into his hands, even though it had disinherited him, it would have been forthcoming. He was Pratt to the core in that sort of rectitude. But, as it was, there being no legal obligation, Adnam knew that he had nothing to hope for from him. Seraph had always been jealous of him, and Seraph was vindictive. But this did not weigh with Adnam in his consideration of what it was right for him to do under the circumstances. The interregnum could not continue without confusion of affairs on the estate. One of them must be put in possession, and after allowing a reasonable time to search for a new will, Adnam announced that he should not oppose the administration of the old one.

"It doesn't seem to me that you would have had much of a case," was Seraph's complaisant acknowledgment.

This settled, Adnam expected and received short shrift, but Seraph only anticipated in the evening what he had himself intended to broach next day, namely, the question of what he was to do.

It was after dinner, and they were still at table, lingering over their dessert. Already, in many little details, painful to Adnam, there were changes apparent. Everything was redolent of Seraph's exuberant taste. The table decoration, so beautifully simple in his stepmother's time, were showy now. There was a clash of colour in china and flowers. The old heavy cut-

glass had been replaced by flimsy modern stuff, and an excessive number of flamboyant decanters. But the crowning abomination was red wax candles with red shades. Seraph preferred to dine late and would no longer allow the homely habit of sending the servants out of the room and waiting on themselves. He had promptly paid off the old servants, trained by his stepmother. He said he must have servants whose ways were his ways. "I mean to do things properly," he told Adnam. "I suppose you don't know what I am worth a year?"

Adnam's private opinion was that he would never be worth anything but money. But Adnam was very sore.

Seraph had become insufferably pretentious and patronising. His airs of proprietorship were offensive. He would swagger up and down the hall by the hour together, shooting out his shirt-cuffs, describing how he was going to make things hum, boasting that they would be very different now, extraordinary improvements being understood, and "my dear fellow-ing" Adnam past endurance. He had returned from Pointz this evening in high good humour. His position in the family there was assured. The vulgar consideration of what pays had decided the question of intimacy, and he had made himself necessary. Now that he felt himself safe, he could look down upon Mrs. Pointz at his ease, and enjoy her humours as a sort of feminine extravaganza designed by nature for the amusement of man. Mrs. Pointz had not gone to his father's funeral. She scouted the notion. She had never heard of such a thing! "A common yeoman—Godiva, how can you!" Godiva showed her how, by going with her father. When, on her return, she described the scene at the graveside, the widow leaning on her son's arm, with a group of ladies about her—"weeping queens"—and the duchess herself holding her hand, Mrs. Pointz sent up a cry of lamentation! She blamed everybody but herself for that she had not been there to grace the mournful pageant. "I should certainly have gone," she explained to Seraph, "to show my respect to your poor dear father—such a *worthy* man!—if I had been told that the duchess was going. We should support each other on these sad occasions. And I should have gone to sit with your poor dear stepmother, too, that trying week, with the inquest, and all that. I know myself

what a comforting thing it is in times of trial just to have a sympathetic heart to sit beside you and hold your hand. However, you see, I get no encouragement. I'm too diffident, I know; but I can't help it."

Seraph was still exhilarated, when he sat down to dinner, by the idea of Mrs. Pointz's sympathetic heart holding his step-mother's hand. He had much ado to keep the joke to himself. Seated in his father's place, when the cloth was withdrawn, he surveyed the table with satisfaction. "Pretty well for a start, I think," he remarked. "No drab for me, thank you. Colour, I find, is refreshing. That china now! It was my poor mother's choice"—he sighed sentimentally. "It's been shoved away on a shelf out of sight all these years."

"If it hadn't been there wouldn't have been much of it left by this time for you to enjoy," Adnam dryly rejoined, roused to defend his mother from the implied reproach. "I remember seeing the set and admiring it one day when I was a little chap,"—he inwardly wondered at his taste as a "little chap." "My mother told me they belonged to Seraph's poor mother, therefore she was taking care of them for Seraph when he should grow up and have a house of his own."

"Oh—very nice of her, I'm sure," Seraph acknowledged.

"That way of speaking of your 'poor mother,' as if the dead were to be pitied, made me think of death as an enemy," Adnam added.

"And don't you think of death as an enemy still?" Seraph asked, slightly blustering.

"*Der Tod als Freund*," Adnam said dreamily. "Death was friendly to my mother. Life was a great lone land to her, and her husband the rock that sheltered her. When that shelter was withdrawn——"

"Come, old chap," Seraph said, not unkindly, "don't get into that groove. Here, have a glass of port"—he pushed the decanter towards him. "It's been a hard knock for you, but a man must pull himself together."

"I beg your pardon," Adnam said. "I'm poor company, please excuse me."

"Look here," Seraph began with an affectation of geniality, at the same time shooting out his shirtcuffs as if to clear the deck for action. "It's time to look forward. I've been thinking

a good deal about you lately, and your future. You are anxious to get away, I expect. You can hardly be said to have made a start in life, and, although, of course, you are young yet, still"—he hunched his shoulders expressively—"it is time." With a graceful movement of his hand he poised his fingers on the stopper of a decanter and admired them. There was disingenuousness in his whole attitude, and Adnam detected it.

"You have not thought of letting the Orchard, I suppose," he said.

"To you?" Seraph answered, raising his eyebrows. "Well, no, my dear boy. You would want capital for such an undertaking. That blackguard business, the destruction of your crop—the first crop, too, that you would have made any large profit on—puts it out of the question for you. I shall make it my business, I assure you"—Seraph swelled with importance—"to sift that villainy to the bottom. I solemnly take upon myself my father's promise to see you righted."

"I can help you," Adnam answered, without emphasis, pushing a decanter of whisky towards him. "There is the villain who destroyed my profits."

Seraph shrank back in his chair. He stared at the decanter as if the spirit in it were an embodied horror, about to spring at him: "I declare to God I don't know what I did that night," he solemnly swore.

"So I have always supposed," Adnam answered equably; "but you inferred what you had done from your own condition next day."

Seraph held up the hand that had been cut and bruised, and examined the scars: "I was puzzled," he said. "I knew I had had a bad bout."

A chill air breathed on his hands and face. The small round table at which they were sitting made an island of light in the dark panelled hall; beyond were heavy shadows. Seraph shivered and looked round furtively: "Gad! it can be eerie here," he muttered.

Adnam also felt the chill, and at the same time he had a sensation as of soft hands clasped caressingly round his neck from behind. It was a trick of his mother's when she passed him sitting at work. The impression was so vivid that, involuntarily, he put up his own hand to clasp her, as had been his

wont: "My mother meant to speak to you," he found himself saying.

"You betrayed me, then!" Seraph exclaimed.

"No. She also inferred. Your shoes betrayed you. She found them clogged with earth and sodden with moisture—your evening shoes. It was my fault, by the way, that she found them. I should have destroyed them myself, and, idiot that I am, I only thought of having them cleaned. My mother took them down to her sitting-room and burned them."

"I could not imagine what had become of those shoes," Seraph muttered.

"I wanted to have it out with you," Adnam pursued; "but she would not let me. She said, 'Leave him to me. He will at least know if the idea of wrecking the Orchard ever entered his head. It should be a lesson to him to control the meditations of his heart, as well as the words of his mouth. It might be murder next time and no mercy shown him.' It very nearly was murder, too—the next time."

Seraph's jaw dropped. "Do you mean——?" He knew well enough that the next time was the night of his father's death.

"I do," said Adnam. "You came down, raving about Popish mummery. You had had that in your mind though you pretended to be so amiably acquiescent when my mother"—his voice broke here. "You see how right she was about your danger," he recommenced with an effort. "What you only think when you're sober, you do when you're drunk. You attacked me. You got me down. It was just a chance that you didn't throttle me. You tried to. If you had, where would you have been now?"

The sweat stood in great drops on Seraph's forehead.

"I got you to bed," Adnam added. "No one knows. No one need ever know."

He left it there. The lesson was obvious, and Seraph was no fool. The revelation was a shock to him; it staggered him for a little. He had no doubt of the truth of it, and was shrewd enough to see the futility of denying it. Instead, he cast about in his mind for a means of escape from the ruin he had risked, the ruin which was still a possibility. It was fear he felt, not shame or remorse; the instinct of self-preservation was strong in him.

"It's like this, you see," he explained confidentially, and with the air of one who shows good reason why, and expects to be excused. "When I am down, I feel that I must have something, and when I am up, I take it to prolong the pleasure. It's temperament——"

"It's a bad habit," Adnam said dryly.

Seraph frowned and thought, rolled in his elbow-chair, and thought and frowned.

At last he pushed the decanter of whisky away from him: "I must give it up," he said, sighing deeply. Then, to assist his resolution, he poured himself out a glass of port wine.

Something occurred to him when in the act: "You said nothing to my father?"

"Not a word."

"He would have disinherited me if you had?"

"He would."

"And you held your noble tongue!"

Seraph uttered the exclamation with an ugly sneer. Adnam might have snatched his inheritance fairly, and Adnam forebore. Only a fool is capable of such self-sacrifice; a man looks out for himself. This stimulating reflection set Seraph up again in his own estimation. Some people's good opinion of themselves is based entirely upon their contempt for the rest of the world. If he could have set Adnam aside to be despised, he would have felt quite friendly towards him. But you cannot altogether safely despise a man who has you in his power; and Seraph, who saw signs of his own shiftiness in everybody at times, felt himself in Adnam's power, and was enraged against him. But Adnam must be conciliated.

"There are only two of us left now, Adnam," he said at last, with a sorrowful shake of his head. "We must stand by each other, old boy. The dear old dad would have wished it, and perhaps he knows! Your mother— There are not many like her, you know. I've heard your mother say that the dead watch over the living. It would be a comfort to me to feel that they both approved of me. I'd like to earn their good opinion yet; and the best way to earn it is to stand by you." Seraph paused. "I'll tell you what I'll do for you," he resumed with an effort, "I'll employ you at a good salary. I can't separate you from your beloved Orchard. I haven't the heart. You shall work it

for me—at a good salary. I can't offer to accommodate you here in the house, much as I should prefer to. You will have to find diggings elsewhere, I am sorry to say. For the truth is"—he shot out his cuffs and tee-hee'd affectedly—"the truth is I am going to be married."

He had anxiously interrogated Adnam's countenance while he was speaking, and continued to watch him anxiously in the pause that followed.

"I should think one of the men would answer your purpose," Adnam said at last, covering the contempt he felt with studied indifference. "Robert Banks might accept the offer perhaps. He is an excellent overseer."

Seraph passed his hand over his face to hide his relief. His primary object had been to mollify Adnam with a show of kind intention; but he had also made the offer in order to be able to say that he had made it. He desired to stand well with his neighbours, and it would never do to leave it in their power to say that he had made no attempt to help Adnam. During the pause, he had had a horrid qualm of fear that Adnam would accept his offer, but Adnam had only paused to choose his words.

"That means that you refuse my offer yourself?" Seraph said, incautious in his haste to make sure.

"It does," Adnam answered stolidly. "I mean to set about making a career for myself elsewhere at once."

Again Seraph passed his hand over his face. His confidence was restored. When he showed himself again, he was all pretentiousness and patronage. Adnam could have kicked him.

"Well, my dear fellow, you certainly need not thank me for the offer, though it was the best I could do for you," Seraph began, then added magnanimously, "the advantage would have been all on my side. Of course, you have it in you to do much better for yourself . . . I shall miss you!" He sighed. "Your help and advice would have been invaluable to me. But perhaps you will kindly oblige me with a little of the latter. About the men, now? Some tips as to character would be useful. I mean to begin as I shall go on, you know. I shall keep a tight hand on them. You know, my dear fellow, I don't agree with your mollicoddling methods. All very well for the party of pleasure that you've been having, I dare say, but I mean

business. It's wonderful to me how you kept order for so long. That kind of thing couldn't last, you know. If you don't keep men down, they'll be uppish sooner or later."

"I found it best to let the men manage themselves," Adnam answered, in his dreamy, deliberate way. Throughout the interview his speech was unimpassioned and slow. He spoke habitually, as a man should speak, without haste, without hesitation, uttering unpalatable truths when necessary, but with that courtesy which robs a difference of opinion of all offence. "Let them organise discipline themselves. The majority are always for order. You took on some of my discharged men at Pointz. You have not found them troublesome, have you?"

"Well, no," Seraph was bound to acknowledge. "But, of course, we've done them well, you know. Besides, they were picked men."

Picked out of the highways and byways, Adnam might have said, but what was the use?

"I keep the whip hand of them, of course," Seraph continued. "I don't want their affection, I want their work."

"People understand each other much better when there's a liking between them," Adnam said.

"What do you want to understand about workmen but their work?" Seraph snapped. "Business is business."

"But business is very much affected by the attitude of the worker," Adnam considered. "The labourer is not a machine, after all. He is at his best when he finds himself treated as a human being."

"He's my machine," said Seraph. "I believe, of course, in keeping my machines in good order for work. Keep 'em clean and dry and well oiled, that's all that's necessary. As to associating with them as human beings"—Seraph hunched his shoulders—"no, thank you! I'm not going to associate with publicans and sinners. I shall take my place among the landed gentry now."

"The landed gentry are much more fastidious than Christ," Adnam hit back—with the obvious.

"That is hardly reverent," Seraph rebuked him, in lofty confusion of mind.

"You will be at home with the landed gentry," Adnam said, smiling slightly.

Seraph had reason to believe that he would. In character he was nearer akin to the parasitic than to the producing people. He was essentially predatory, and at one with the rulers and governors who ruled and governed in their own interests only. Like them, he tolerated but one point of view, and that his own. Had he lived in the days when the peasants were robbed of their poor privileges of planting and pasturage by the Commons Enclosure Act, he would have been on the side of the squires who coveted such scraps to swell their own broad acreage. He would not acknowledge even now that a primary cause of the embarrassing lack of hands to till the land was the result of similar acts of brigandage, which, by depriving the labourer of the little comfort he had in his habitual state of semi-starvation, effectually drove him from the land. His attitude was exactly the same as that of Squire Appleton Pointz; the difference was in the shrewd business capacity which he had inherited from his own people. His theories were the same as the squire's, but in practice he knew when to make concessions that would pay. As he had proved to advantage on the Pointz property that they did pay, he stood high in the squire's estimation; and, being a man of means himself now, he had every reason to believe that the marriage he contemplated would raise him in the county to the position he coveted.

He smiled, broadly complacent, at Adnam's last remark, and put the stopper into a decanter with an affectedly graceful movement of his hand. He had learnt from Godiva lately that his hands were well shaped.

"By the way," he said, with his little tee-hee, "you don't show much interest in my matrimonial project. You have not even asked the name of the lady."

"I am interested in all that concerns you," Adnam answered politely; "and especially so in anything that it may please you to tell me about the lady—her name included, *bien entendu*."

"I wish you wouldn't spout that beastly jargon at me," Seraph said irritably.

"I beg your pardon. But, pray tell me, who is the lucky lady?"

Seraph's complacency returned. He drew himself up, settled his waistcoat, and felt himself as fine a looking man as his father. "Godiva Pointz," he answered impressively.

Adnam was not overwhelmed. "A good daughter makes a good wife, they say," he remarked. "I congratulate you."

"Hold hard," Seraph laughed. "I've not proposed to her yet."

"I wish you success," Adnam amended with unvarying gravity.

"Thanks." Seraph surveyed the hall. "The old place has its good points," he said, largely patronising. "We'll make something of it together."

Adnam's heart contracted. His mother's beautiful simplicity of taste set aside for red wax candles! He was again conscious of soft hands clasping him round the neck from behind, caressingly. The chill air breathed upon hands and face. Seraph peered about him into the dark shadowy corners.

"There's a damned draught every now and then," he said irritably; "do you feel it?"

"Yes," Adnam whispered. The sensation of soft hands caressing him was so real that, again, involuntarily, he raised his own to clasp them.

"What's the matter with you? Why do you speak like that?" Seraph snapped, glancing furtively about out of the corners of his eyes. "What's come to the hall? I never felt anything like this before. It's—it's eerie."

"It is comforting, I think."

The sensation of soft hands caressing him lingered a moment, as though in farewell, and then was withdrawn. Seraph's disturbance subsided, but he was shaken, conscience stricken, and his next words showed it. "We have done nothing about your poor mother's things," he said, "her belongings, furniture, and all that. Of course, all that was hers is yours."

"Most of the furniture she used belongs to the house," Adnam answered. "She told me how she had found precious pieces degraded in the offices, or put away to take their chance of dry rot in the attics. Her own particular chair she bought——"

"Keep it then, my dear fellow," Seraph interrupted, magnanimously. "Her pictures, too, and books, and piano. Everything, in fact, that you like to claim as hers. And—er—if it would be any convenience, I will store anything you like for you here for the present—except her trinkets and lace. I would

rather you put those things in the bank. Anything else I could keep my eye on and take good care of for you."

Adnam acknowledged the kindness of the offer, and accepted it without hesitation. Seraph had the family respect for a promise.

There was a pause, then Adnam said: "There is the debt to the duke on the Orchard. You know that he invested money in it. It is a debt of honour. The duke has no security but my word. What is to be done about it?"

Seraph rapidly calculated. It appeared to him that by taking Adnam's debt to the duke on himself, he would raise himself high in the estimation of the whole neighbourhood, both as a man of honour and a generous brother. He was playing for a position in the county, and he expected and was prepared to pay high for it.

"The money was put into the Orchard," Adnam added. "I spent most of it on the huts."

"I shall take the debt upon myself, of course," Seraph said grandly.

"That is a great relief to my mind."

"And to your pocket too, I should think," Seraph said dryly.

"And to my pocket too," Adnam conceded. "There is one thing more," he continued after a pause. "The Orchard has been yours since the day of my father's death——"

Seraph hastened to agree.

"And the men in your employ."

Seraph, with more reluctance, supposed so.

"I have been running it for you then, and paying your men out of my own pocket."

"Oh—yes. I see what you're driving at. Of course, I shall refund any out-of-pocket expenses you have had on my account. I take the cost of the repairs upon myself, too," he added, as if he was conferring a favour.

Adnam merely nodded. His father had saddled Seraph with the debt by giving orders for the repairs himself. There was nothing to thank Seraph for. He had not offered a penny of compensation for the heavy loss he had entailed upon him; neither did it occur to him to express regret for what he had done. And Adnam, determined to have no sordid dispute about money, let the matter drop. Seraph's disingenuousness was

a greater offence to him than his meanness, and, during the pause that followed, his thoughts were not pleasant. Seraph, who allowed for no personal equation but his own, and to whom therefore Adnam was always an enigma, watched him furtively but closely. He had an uneasy suspicion that Adnam was not satisfied and might at this moment be considering how to make profit of the hold he had upon him. True, Adnam could only assert, but an assertion from Adnam, who was popular and highly respected, would be as damaging as an action at law, with proof positive brought into court. If Adnam chose to blackmail him? He did not really believe him capable of such a thing, but still he allowed himself to contemplate the possibility. How could he be sure? Seraph prided himself on never being surprised at anything a man might do, but, as a matter of fact, human nature was full of surprises for him because of his own limits. A man with only one point of view never knows enough of life to make him secure, and Seraph had been out in his calculations often enough already to make him suspicious and wary.

He could detect nothing in Adnam's inscrutable face, however, to give him a clue to his feelings. What did strike him particularly seemed at first irrelevant, but presently it recalled something to his mind which could obviously be turned to his own advantage. The irrelevant something that struck him was Adnam's extraordinary likeness to his mother. It had always been noticeable, but in their happy days he had looked like a young embodiment in the flesh of the pure spirit of which she seemed all compact. Now, sorrow had sharpened his features, and there was a new depth in his eyes, as of a suffering soul ennobled by fortitude. She had shone transparently a mystic, and in him, now that the veil of flesh had fallen away, more than a promise of the same power, still latent, was revealed. As he sat there the close resemblance of their features was heightened by the inward look which in moments of deep abstraction had characterised her face, and gave to the likeness the last accentuating touch which made it so remarkable. Seraph had trusted his stepmother though he had not loved her, and something of the same feeling for Adnam came over him now suddenly, and swept his doubts away. Pulling himself together like a man relieved, he broke out in the tone of

one who has good news to give, and takes a pleasure in the giving.

"By the way, I had forgotten"—and he really had forgotten, his own interests, as usual, being uppermost in his mind—"talking of making a career for yourself, the son of the Countess Aubon Strelletzen——"

"Excuse me," Adnam interrupted, "my mother was Countess Ursula Aubon Strelletzen, an honorary title merely."

"Excuse *me*," Seraph rejoined positively, "your mother died Countess Aubon Strelletzen. It is the second title in your family, the title of the younger branch, and, for special reasons, descends in the female as well as the male line. Your mother forfeited her right to it by marrying a foreigner. But the state is greatly indebted to your family for valuable services rendered, and on the representation of your uncle, the prince, who lost the second title on becoming head of the family, and who is, it appears *persona grata* in high places in spite of his——"

"Originality," Adnam suggested.

"Originality, my dear fellow, if you like," Seraph rejoined, shooting out his shirtcuffs and displaying his hand in the most elegant attitudes with a dainty touch (as if his fastidious fingers shrank from the contact), on a dessert dish here, on a wineglass there, for the ostensible purpose of setting them straight.

"Or because of it," Adnam suggested ironically.

"Or because of it," Seraph again conceded with deceitful suavity, shrugging his shoulders to signify that it really didn't matter. But he was annoyed. Adnam was lowering his importance, besides confusing a fine effect, by not taking the matter seriously. He deserved a rap. "Your men seem to have been struck by his 'originality'—at least, they suspect him of spying amongst them here in the interests of his own government, certainly an 'original' proceeding for a man in his position."

"Do they!" Adnam flashed out indignantly.

"He professed to be making inquiries, you know," Seraph reminded him, with a smile. The rap had evidently stung.

"By which you mean to insinuate——"

"Oh, my dear fellow, I insinuate nothing." He waved the

notion away with affected urbanity. "What I mean to say is that the prince, your uncle, is evidently *persona grata* in high places. The traditions of the family as good servants of the state are enough to account for that. At all events, upon his representation, the title which had lapsed was revived lately, and conferred on your mother by Royal Letters Patent. Consequently she became Countess Aubon Strelletzen."

"And I became Count Adnam Aubon Strelletzen *Pratt*? Heavens, what a concatenation!"

Seraph discountenanced this levity with a look. Titles were to him a serious matter. He enjoyed handling the subject, and swelled with importance as he proceeded. He felt that the lustre of titles was being shed upon him, that the close connexion was next door to the dignity.

"At the present moment," he said, bowing to Adnam, "I have the honour to address—Count Aubon Strelletzen."

"Rot!" expressed Adnam's first impression. Seraph threw back his head and looked up at the ceiling.

Adnam began to think. The information was something of a shock to him. What did it mean precisely? Presently one point stood out clearly. "Why was I not told this before?" he asked.

"That you might be educated to think as you do on the subject, I should imagine," Seraph answered dryly. "Your parents did not value position themselves, and never considered the advantage it might be to their sons."

"Why were you informed?" Adnam asked, ignoring the jibe.

"I was not. I came across the information accidentally among some papers of my father's that I have had to go through. I tell you because I think it my duty. You have a right to know who you are. You shall have the papers tomorrow. There is no pecuniary benefit attached to the title that I can discover, but it may be an advantage in itself——"

"More likely an encumbrance."

"You can drop it. If you could pass it on to me I should know what to do with it—tee-hee!"

"An empty title!" Adnam ejaculated.

"Count of the Holy Roman Empire sort of thing, you think, eh? Come, not so bad as that! It gives you genuine rank in

your mother's country, at least. And, my dear boy, genuine rank is not a thing to be despised, I assure you! You'll find it a solid foundation to build upon, I can tell you! You're not bound to be English, you know. You're a free man with the whole world before you, you lucky dog! and two nationalities to choose from. You can be your mother's son if you like without disrespect to your father. He, dear old chap, would have approved of any honour you paid her. Gad! you're to be envied! Look at me—tied here in a corner to a few hundred acres!"

Seraph, heartened himself by all this kindly encouragement, beamed upon Adnam as if he had done him a good turn. "Besides, you know," he added, "so long as your uncle does not marry and have children, you are his heir apparent. I should think, if the truth were known, it was in order to make you his heir that he agitated to have the impoverished branch of the family re-instated—in position, at all events." Seraph would have said "poverty stricken" rather than "impoverished" in the case of a family not ennobled and branching. "Do you know where your uncle is?"

"I do not."

"What do you think of going in for? political activities?"

"Social activities, if possible. I don't see myself tramping about the country, lying for party purposes. The politics you mean are mere machine work—inhuman."

There was a pause, during which Adnam surveyed his prospects. He was about to face the world alone with a few pounds in his pocket, an empty foreign title, the eventual chance of a great inheritance, and a threat of starvation in the near future if he did not immediately find work to do. He meant to make his own way or starve. The blood rushed hotly to his face at the thought of himself suing for help or countenance to anybody *in forma pauperis*. He was determined to hide himself from any important person he knew until he needed no countenance. The hope of success was—at that moment—pretty equally mixed with the fear of failing. Such chances as his to set out adventuring upon might be romantic, but some certainty would have been more encouraging, and his heart sank.

Seraph pushed back his chair and rose from the table yawn-

ing. "Well, I should say—I don't know what you think—but I should say that you start with a field marshal's baton in your knapsack right enough."

Seraph salved his own conscience with the expression of this high conviction. It acted as an anodyne on some latent uneasiness he had in his mind with regard to Adnam's present position and future prospects. In uttering it he persuaded himself that the baton was as good as bestowed, and that Adnam could ask no more of him or any man.

Adnam said, "Thank you," in the hope that Seraph was wishing him well.

What little business they had still to transact together they got through next morning. In the afternoon Seraph went to Pointz to stay the night. Having ascertained that Adnam meant to be gone before his return, he took leave of him before the servants with a hearty shake of the hand and gushing good wishes. He was careful not to inquire into Adnam's intentions. He knew that he was going to London, but for what purpose, he shrank from being informed. It was pleasanter to take it for granted that Adnam had something definite in view; to know that he had not would have complicated the situation.

Adnam's simple preparations for his departure were soon made. The day sufficed for them. He sent the belongings he was taking with him into Closeminster by the carrier, and towards evening he went out to make his few farewells. They were chiefly to places—haunts of his boyhood, where he had played; scenes associated with these later years, where he had dreamed a young man's dreams, and planned and worked and suffered, and hoped and prayed. There was no familiar spot, not one, that he had any cause to be ashamed to visit; no familiar face into which he need fear to look. He had his faults, and doubtless he had made mistakes; but he had never a sin on his conscience, nor an evil thought in his mind.

He followed the road that faced the sea, the road that climbed half-way up the Castle hill and skirted round it, like a ledge, to the village. It was at a turn of this road that he had come upon Ella, Lena, Melton, and Eustace, one day, and had picked Ella up out of the group, and carried her off on his horse. He stood awhile on the spot, recalling the incident. There were storm clouds about that day and the sunset was

lurid. To-day the sombre sky hung low over its reflection in a sombre sea. The colour of sadness and the stillness of resignation prevailed. As he walked on, he glanced up at the Castle. Grey and sombre, it stood, facing the Coastguard's Death solemnly. At the highest point of the road Adnam looked down on Her Repose. He stood there long in contemplation. The narrow path by which Lena had passed backwards and forwards from the Castle crossed the road here. He thought of her, a beautiful soul imprisoned in a body that betrayed her. Surely, at Her Repose, the body had ceased from troubling, and the soul had been seen at its loveliest.

In the thickly gathering twilight he knelt by his parents' grave. He remembered how he had prayed that his mother might have rest and peace. Well, his prayer had been answered, not as he had expected or would have had it, but for the best—he acknowledged it now—and for her it was well.

Lights were twinkling in the village. The cronies assembled at the Brabant Arms were in full session, discussing the subject uppermost in their minds at the moment with slow dropping comments, like men who had all eternity before them in which to discuss it, and no obligation laid upon them ever to make up their minds or come to any special conclusion. Emery Pratt and his lady—it was terrible sad! and the misfortunate poor young chap Adnam, what was he to do? And that Seraph!—Seraph was somehow an unknown quantity, not to be reckoned up by any common denominator in use amongst them, and therefore distrusted. Words failed them when he was mentioned, and noses were buried in beermugs, and heads were shaken, to fill in the hiatus. Adam Hurst, who made it his business in life now to keep up the convivial spirit by conversation, set them going again.

"Eh, yes," he began, by way of showing himself in sympathetic agreement with everything hitherto said. "There's queer odd ones in families, so to speak. Now, Adnam, he's quality on his mother's side, and looks it, none more so in the best families, as I should know. But that Seraph——"

"I remember Seraph's mother," old Ryecote said impressively, shaking his head; and then repeated with an emphasis expressive of strong disapproval, "I remember his mother."

"So do I," Farmer Hallbin backed him up.

The company understood that decent men could say no more, but Seraph was accounted for. Ellery Banks defended old Emery. "There isn't a man as doesn't make a mistake once in his life," he said. "Some makes a-many, mostly little 'uns; some makes but one, but then it's a big 'un. It's like as if we'd got it allotted to us to make up so much weight in mistakes, and the one big 'un balances the many small 'uns, so as we're all equal. I've noticed myself that it's the best men as makes the big 'un, and works off their lot at one go."

"You may say so of Emery Pratt," Hallbin agreed. "As good a man on the land as ever sowed to reap."

"Come to that," Ellery said, in the interests of fair play, "so's that Seraph. He knows 'is own business right enough."

"Knows the farmin' business, I suppose you mean," Pettiblock put in; "but that's only a bit of his business as a man. What's 'e goin' to be in all that's left over of the business o' life, I ask you?"

Heads were shaken at this, doubtfully.

But good ale is a cheery beverage, it makes for dispassionate talk, and the leaning was to subjects that expand the heart. Harsh judgments, even when temperately expressed, are a bar to good feeling. The digestive system reflects every mood. Be disagreeable, and it revolts; be charitable, and you encourage it; be sympathetic and kindly considerate, and it works well. Excitements, whether painful or pleasurable, injure it; happiness restores it; grief destroys it. At the Brabant Arms they knew little about the digestive system, but experience had taught them that when they were kindly disposed, they felt well. Therefore they instinctively avoided extracting the bitters of life, and cultivated a kindly disposition with the sweets of discourse.

Adam Hurst backed off the barque Good Feeling from the conversational shoal that would have wrecked it; and, the breeze being caught, the sails soon filled, and they were off again, safe on the solemn sea. "Well, Emery Pratt himself was an all-round man, if you like," he said. "A fine man. Nature's gentleman, as his grace used to say."

"Ay, and a good neighbour, none better; he'll be missed!" Hallbin supplemented. "As to rank, a man that ranks with the

best can rank no higher—and Emery Pratt ranked with the best.”

“And his poor lady, too,” old Ryecote sighed.

“She was a bit proud, I should say,” Luke Banks ventured.

“Proud? not a bit of it,” his father contradicted. “Kept herself to herself, if you like, and a right of it. No gad-about, as you may say, but she did a power o’ good, sittin’ there in ’er parlour. Any one who’s bin in trouble could tell you.”

“That’s so,” said Ryecote, sighing again. “And we all ’as our troubles. Sad trouble some on us.”

He had been a broken man since his daughter’s lapse, and it was understood that he referred to it now.

“That’s true,” said Farmer Hallbin sympathetically. “But it’s bad to brood on it. I always say, the way to bother a bother is not to bother about it.”

Nods signified general approval of this, and Ellery Banks, who felt that enough had not been made of the previous question, resumed: “She were a good living lady, as ever was. My girl Ella could tell you! And she brought that boy of hers up well.”

“Yes,” said Adam Hurst. “His grace himself, standing just where you’re sitting now, Mr. Hallbin”—the farmer looked about him on the floor as if signs of the honour done it were likely to be apparent—“his grace says, ‘It’s his mother, a lovely creature, Adam,’ he says to me, as he do sometimes confidential. He says sometimes, ‘We’ve grown up together, you and me, Adam,’ he says, ‘and now I’ll tell you what I think——’”

“You were going to tell us what he said about Mrs. Pratt,” Pettiblock reminded him.

“I was, Lem, I was,” Adam agreed, with an effort to remember. “Self-reliance—that’s the ticket. His grace says, ‘You may shake a man’s faith in God, and still he’ll get on; but shake his faith in himself and he’s done. A man without faith in himself,’ his grace says to me, ‘has no self-reliance to depend upon in an emergency, and it’s in emergencies that a man gets his chance. To come well out of an emergency, is to be marked for advancement.’”

“Which isn’t to say Adnam Pratt’s got no faith in his God, I hope!” Robert Banks broke his habitual silence to exclaim in a tone that startled them.

"No, no, I'm just telling you," Adam Hurst said soothingly. "His grace was praisin' 'im."

"The lad deserves it," old Ryecote said.

"He bore 'imself well at the inquest," Hallbin asserted. "A fine promising lad, as straight as his father, and framed to be just such another."

"And at the grave," old Ryecote went on. "Both times. Oh, it was 'ard. Both on 'em in one week. It were a broken 'eart took the poor lady off, you may be sure; and it wouldn't surprise me if the lad's broke too. He's 'ad enough, what with one thing and another."

Here feeling hearts shook their heads, so to speak, and there was a pause for refreshment. It was a good preparation for the dramatic entry of Adnam himself, come to take leave of his old acquaintances.

Moved by his mourning and misfortunes, the company to a man stood up to receive him. The kindly courtesy touched him deeply. It was with difficulty that he managed to speak. "I am going away to-morrow," he said. "I have come to say good-bye."

There must be sadness in the last look at beloved objects, the last words with old friends, even when the leave-taking but argues a change from one happy set of circumstances to another. The poor boy had no such consolation. Driven out into the world alone by the self-respect which would not allow him to linger where he knew that he was not wanted a moment longer than he could help, with little money, and with nothing more definite in view than the certainty of a hard time to come, there was little to mitigate the sadness of his farewells, but in that little there was comfort enough to save him from despair. It was conveyed to him by every hand that shook his. People vied with each other in efforts to express that inarticulate sympathy which consoles. In their manner they bore witness to the cordial esteem in which he was held, and kept up his courage by the sincerity of the good wishes with which they bade him "God-speed." A man may well consider that proof of his power to win respect and affection is the most precious part of the equipment with which he sets out to face the world alone; such certainty of the heart helps the head at many a critical

moment, when, without it, nothing would seem worth while.

But, oh, the return to the empty house that night was hard! The very outside walls seemed now to withhold a welcome, and the dark windows stabbed like eyes that once looked lovingly, and look still—stare—but coldly. There was neither light nor warmth to receive him. The wood fire in the hall, which his father had loved for its fragrance as well as for its brightness and warmth, was out. Even the ashes had been cleared away. He struck a match and looked round. Seraph's servants had got well into Seraph's ways already. No preparations had been made for Adnam. He had eaten nothing for hours; but he did not think of food. There was one feeble oil lamp alight in the inner hall. He stood for a moment at the foot of the stairs. People were talking in the back premises, Seraph's people. They were nothing to Adnam, nor he to them. The sound of their voices only made his loneliness the lonelier. No deserted child could have felt more forlorn, and, sobbing like a deserted child, he stole upstairs to his mother's room. It struck with the comfortless chill of a room long disused and neglected. The blinds were up, the curtains had not been drawn. There was no sense of a presence as in a room that is constantly occupied, no companionable feeling that some one would return to it presently. The pale star-shine just dissipated the darkness enough to make familiar objects visible, but dimly and transformed, the shadowy semblance of themselves. A deserted spot where life has once been lived is the more desolate for the association. There is no pang in mere emptiness unless it be accompanied by the sense of irreparable loss. It was this that the cold dark unwelcoming room brought home to Adnam fully, for the first time. He threw himself down on the floor beside his mother's chair, and laid his poor cheek against the senseless wood, hallowed to him by the touch of her hand. It was the nearest he could come to her.

Next morning, early, Robert Banks, by order, marshalled the men at the front door, and Adnam, very pale, but calm and inscrutable as ever, in a few simple words bade them farewell.

"I wish to express my obligation to you," he said. "You have done your duty by me loyally, like men, at all times. Our work together was richly rewarded by success, thanks to you all.

We did not reap the reward of our success; but for that we were none of us to blame; and your hearts have been with me in my trouble. I have felt your sympathy, and it has helped me greatly. You know that the Orchard is now my brother's. It has been his since the day of my father's death, and the work that we have done in it together since then has been done for him. I am leaving him now, but I trust that you will all remain with him, and be to him what you have been to me. You know him. You will find him reasonable and just. I think that I have not failed in my duty to you in anything as an employer. If I have, it has been the mistake of my ignorance, and you could not blame me for it more than I should regret it myself. I wish you all health and happiness. I take leave of you with the hope that you will all do well and prosper. If it be so ordered that I shall meet you again, all of you, or any one of you, I shall be glad. I trust that I have won your respect as you have won mine. Let it be our endeavour to live always so as to deserve each other's respect and the respect of the world, whatever may happen to us, wherever we may be."

The men had listened to him in solemn silence, as to a funeral oration, and they could not have been more moved had the words been spoken by the side of a grave. He was a boy to most of them, in experience if not in years. It had leaked out, as such things do leak out, that his brother had turned him adrift without means, and the plucky way he was taking it appealed to them strongly. He had addressed them from the steps, standing bareheaded, cap in hand. A responsive murmur from time to time had kept him aware that what he was saying was being well received. When he stopped, there was a movement amongst the men, and Corporal George Locke was pushed forward to express their sentiments. Robert Banks would have been the proper person to speak for them by right of position. He faced them now from the bottom of the steps, silent and grim and dark; but they did not think of making him spokesman. He had always stood at Adnam's elbow, aloof from them, and they had never thought of him as one of themselves, although he was Locke's chum. Locke himself was more of their own sort of human being.

He came forward now, clutching at the tag ends of what he had it in his mind to say; gulped to gain time, took off his cap,

and finally plunged: "Sore and sorry we are to see you go, sir, like this," he began. "You'll be a loss to us, and—and—to the parish that bore you." ("Hear, hear.") "You can't wish us no better than we wish you. And as to respect. The employer as respects his men, sir, gets his respect back with a profit. A profit what profits a man, be he who he may, more nor respect by itself, sir, some fellows think." He was shy of the word he wanted, and twirled his cap to summon up courage to pronounce it. "The profit he gets, sir, what respects us and our rights in our 'umble speer is—we like him." The word "affection" would not come out, so he swallowed it with a gulp. "You'll do twice as much for the man you like as you'd do for another. It's human nature. And as to bein' loyal to Mr. Seraph Pratt, we'll do our best to get on with him. We're sorry to part, sir. We wishes you well."

"Thank you, thank you!" Adnam exclaimed, and stepped down amongst them hurriedly. He was afraid to hear more.

The men came up to him one by one, took off their caps, and grasped his hand. Each in turn tried to say something suitable to the occasion. The French gardeners stood apart. They had not quite followed the speech. Adnam, addressing them in French, explained, and received their courteous salutations, *vœux et souhaits*.

There was still Robert, standing behind him, attending him to the last. Adnam turned to him, and wrung his hand. "Robert," he said, "my last request. You will stay with my brother?"

"I'll make no promise," Robert answered. "If he conducts himself— But, at any rate, only until you and me can come together again."

Adnam left the house on foot, prepared to walk into Closeminster. Money was scarce, Seraph had made him no offer of a conveyance, and certainly he would neither take one nor ask for one. Seraph made capital out of this afterwards to prove himself aggrieved. He accused Adnam of malice. He said he left the house on foot in order to make it appear that he had been turned out. Seraph maintained indignantly that just the reverse had happened. It was Adnam who had "chucked" him. He was his own master and could go when he chose, but he had no business to go off like that. He was welcome to any horse

and trap on the premises to take him anywhere he liked, and his going on foot without a word just showed what he was, a *poseur*, trying to make himself out ill-used. Seraph's own character might have been made out from the accusation. We betray ourselves by what we impute to others; evil minds see evil in every one, and voice their own turpitude in mean interpretations of motive and deed.

Adnam had to set his teeth hard the first part of the way. Fortunately there was no one about, and he was hoping that he would not have his constancy again tried by farewells, when, at a sudden bend of the road, he came face to face with Lord Melton, returning from a morning ride.

Melton saluted him cordially, and pulled up. "Where are you off to so early?" he asked.

"I'm off to seek my fortune," Adnam answered bravely.

"Really!" Melton exclaimed. "You will go to London, I suppose, as Ella Banks is there."

"I am going to London, but not because Ella Banks is there. I had not thought of her as being in London—though of course I knew she was. I am glad you reminded me, for I haven't her address, and must get it from Robert. I should like to see her."

"I thought you were engaged to Ella!" Melton blurted out.

"I—engaged to Ella?" Adnam took off his cap in order to be able to laugh unrestrainedly. "Who could have told you that?" he asked. "And with what object?"

The object was clear enough to Melton now, but seeing that it was his mother who had misled him, neither question could be answered. "It is curious how these absurd rumours get about," he answered evasively.

"Well, there never was a more absurd rumour than that," Adnam rejoined. "I am not at all the sort of fellow Ella would distinguish to that extent, even if I had wished it, which I never did."

The constriction which had long hampered Melton's heart suddenly snapped. He looked out and about him and saw a new world. He looked at Adnam and admired him. His attitude was singularly graceful at the moment. Added to his fine physique, developed by a healthy open-air life and strenuous work, he had that high look which comes of generations of

delicately nurtured forebears, born to position and with the power to command. Sometimes, in a pause of the conversation, and particularly when the mind, just relieved of a load, is rebounding with pleasure, the appearance of some one we know intimately suddenly strikes us as more attractive than we had thought. Melton, looking at Adnam now in just such a pause, was so struck: "You are an uncommonly good-looking fellow, Adnam!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

The words let loose a flood of recollection that was too much for Adnam. He broke down completely.

"Oh, forgive me," Melton begged in consternation. "I have said something to wound you—most unintentionally, believe me."

Adnam turned away until he had recovered himself. "It is for me to apologise," he said, as soon as he could speak. "I am ashamed of myself. But— You will understand when I tell you. Those were the last happy words my mother said to me. The next moment Seraph brought the news——"

Melton wrung his hand in silence, and in silence each went his way.

It had not occurred to Melton to ask this playfellow of his childhood what his prospects were. He took it for granted that his prospects were good, that required neither help nor money. He was ready enough with both in case of need, but the trouble with him was that he generally overlooked any need that he had never felt himself. Born drifter that he was, he went his way, taking things for granted, not inquiring into them. Some things were all wrong, he knew, but as those things had always been all wrong, he was satisfied that they were so ordained, and that there was no help for it. He had half a mind, as he rode away, to call back over his shoulder: "Mind you look me up when you're in town"—but it didn't seem to matter. He would look Adnam up himself. He had been thinking of going to a place of his own in another part of the county when they met, but the current had changed. It was a rapid current now, on which he was drifting, a whirling impetuous current which had caught him and was carrying him headlong to London. Ella was free.

Adnam had a long hill to breast, the hill that led up over

the moors to Closeminster. He took it bravely, eyes front, but his mind was still astray, wandering in the old haunts with the old friends. He did not review his own career amongst them—in a certain sense he was selfless—but he might have done so without a qualm. The hard part of aspiration is that a man, to be worth anything, must never be self-satisfied. We climb upwards on our discontents. The sense of the little we do compared with the amount that we might have done is the spur which urges us to more determined efforts. Adnam had always been simply and naturally himself, without pose, because he took no interest in himself as he appeared to others. All his interest centred in others as they appeared to him. His manner was the outcome of this attitude, and a valuable asset, though he did not know it. Always courteous, always aloof—therein lay his power to protect himself. His equals never got near enough, never felt that they knew him well enough, to take liberties; his inferiors were held in check by something which discouraged familiarity—an unknown quantity in reserve that might be dangerous. The opposition to him as an innovator was always abstract, never personal; and such as it was he had lived it down—first of all by the simple expedient of ignoring it in so far as he was aware of it, which was not to any great extent; for he sailed his own course straight, untroubled by the egotism which would have made the estimation in which he was held a matter of importance to be inquired into; and finally by the success of his innovation. The proof that there is money in an undertaking is the most convincing proof you can give to the mob of mankind of its respectability; the morality of the means ceases to be questioned if the resulting percentage on the outlay is phenomenally high and reasonably safe. With this double recommendation on his balance sheet, the innovator finds himself shot up from amongst the contemned into the proud position of public benefactor, where he may bask at ease in the soft approving light which decorates the throne of cent. per cent. without discovering anything inconvenient. Adnam had made the fortune of the neighbourhood potentially by showing it what could be done with the land, and in so doing, he had made his mark; but this he did not realise. He had not made his own fortune and was plus nothing but the experience, the value of which he had not yet realised either. He realised

nothing, in fact, but that he had to begin all over again without one of the advantages with which he had made his first start. The position was comfortless enough, and it is to his credit that he faced it confidently, without once allowing to himself that it might be hopeless. Failure and success answer to expectation; we steer straight for the goal towards which we steadily gaze.

Adnam paused on the brow of the hill to look back, a last look. Spread out before him were the scenes of almost his every important experience so far. Pointz was on the left. He could see the mansion just appearing above its sentinel guard of age-old forest trees; and the desolate flats in front where the curlew cried; and their boundary line of low sea shore, upon which white-crested waves were breaking, monotonously intent upon their everlasting toil, callously indifferent to all else. Immediately below was the home of his childhood, set about with fair fields, rich pasturage, wood and water. Beyond, to the right, the ground swept up grandly to the Castle hill, and the old grey Castle itself stood out, proudly erect, defiantly facing the giant craig of the Coastguard's Death, as it might be facing its doom.

These last impressions were emotional. Adnam did not think, he did not need to. The scene was imprinting itself on his memory to be recalled at will, or to present itself involuntarily, in all its details, on many and many a day to come. But because of his youth and the sunshine, and because of the breeze and the early morning music of the leaves, and because of the loveliness of the land, of the cloud-flecked sky, of the sparkling sea, he was uplifted in his sadness, he had the glorious consciousness of life before and after, life to be thought upon and life to be lived. He knew that just to be alive is good. And he was ready to live, ready to start afresh, relying upon his stock-in-trade: high principles, high intelligence, fine physique, courage, and hope.

A speck far down on the road had been steadily advancing. It proved to be Farmer Hallbin, driving his gig. Doubtless he was on his way to Closeminster. It was market day. Adnam had business of his own there too, of which he was now reminded. He was going to take leave of his few friends in the place, the Perrys, Paul MacAllen Ray, and the second-hand

bookseller. The jolly old farmer recognised him as he approached, and waved his whip boisterously.

"What, Adnam, my boy!" he exclaimed as he pulled up. "Where's your vehicle?"

"I'm on foot," Adnam answered.

"On foot," the old man cried. "Tut, tut. On foot's no good when you can ride. And everything's bad for something. Walking's bad for shoe leather. Here, jump up beside me, and let me give you a lift."

Adnam thanked him, and jumped up. As he seated himself, he looked his last. The sun was shining on Pratt's Place, but over the Castle a great dark cloud was heavily lowering. Resolutely turning his back on the scene of all that had hitherto been dearest to him in life, he faced forward bravely—to all that might be yet to come.

Henceforth, Adnam's Orchard was the World.

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